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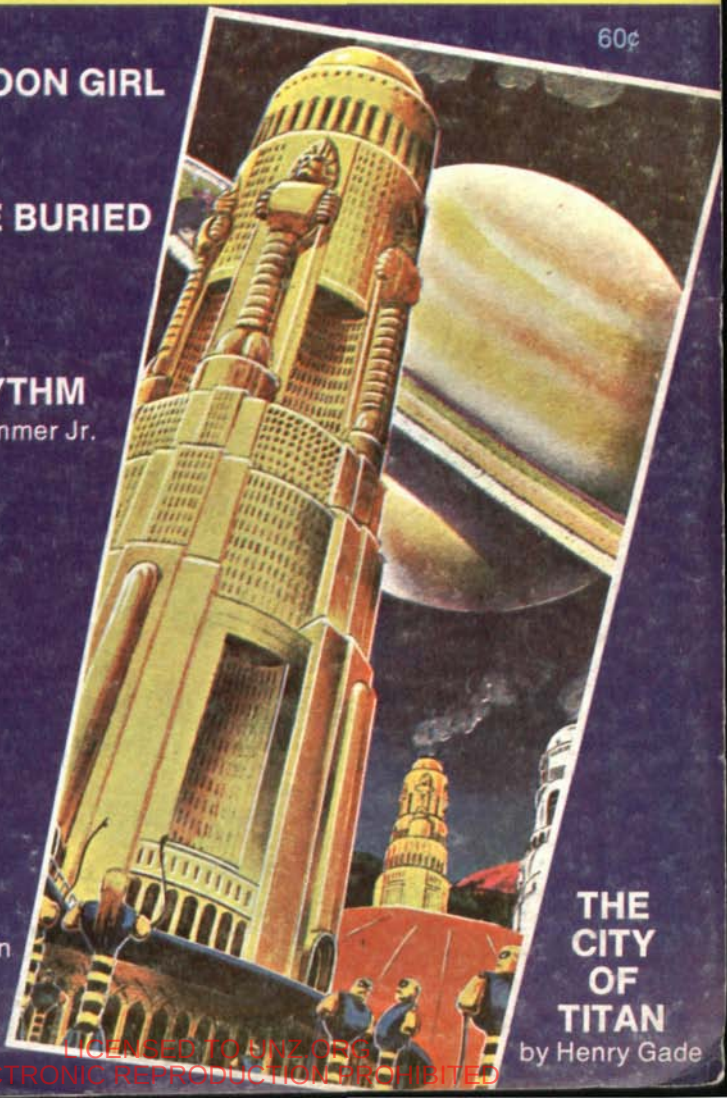

THE CITY OF TITAN
by Henry Gade

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LILINE, THE MOON GIRL

by Edmond Hamilton

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Cover by FRANK R. PAUL

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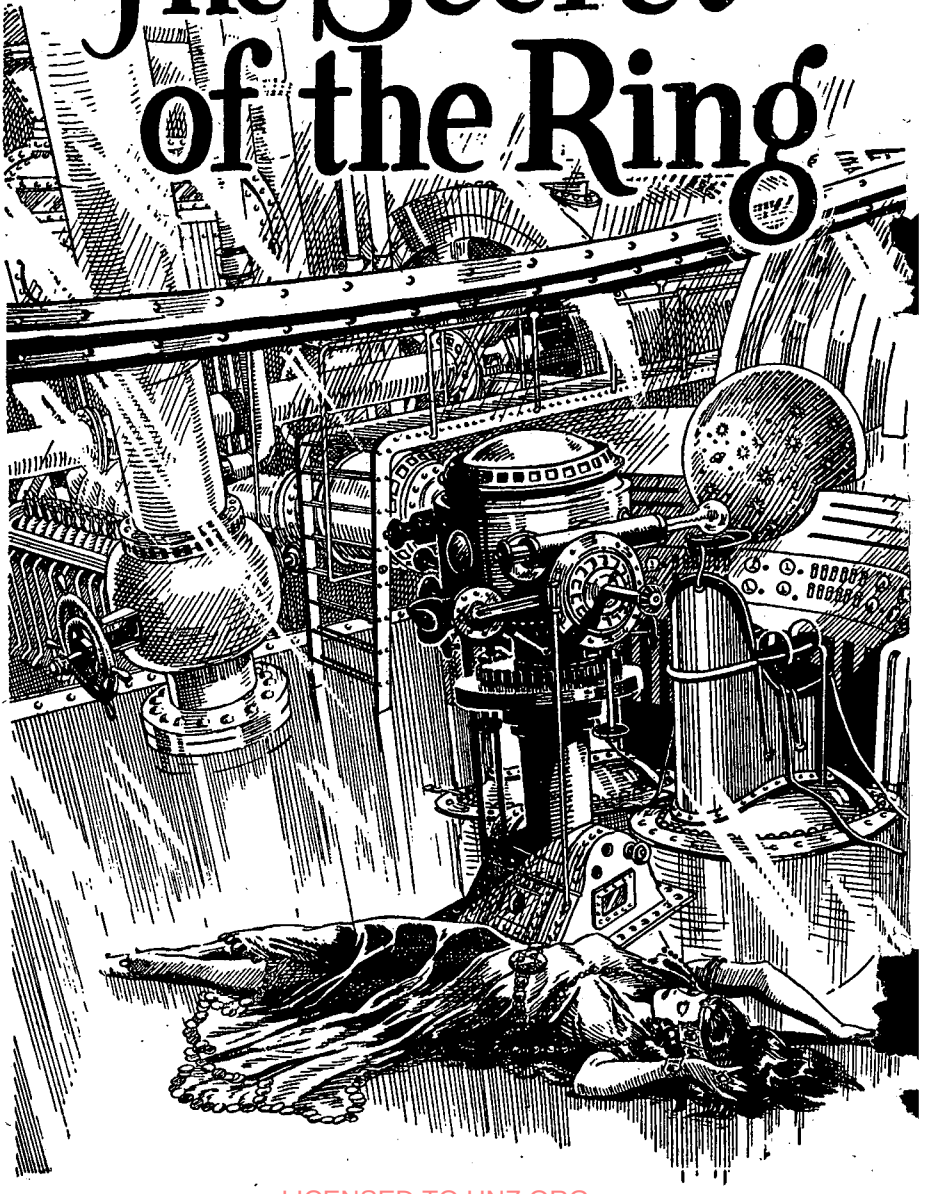
The Secret of the Ring



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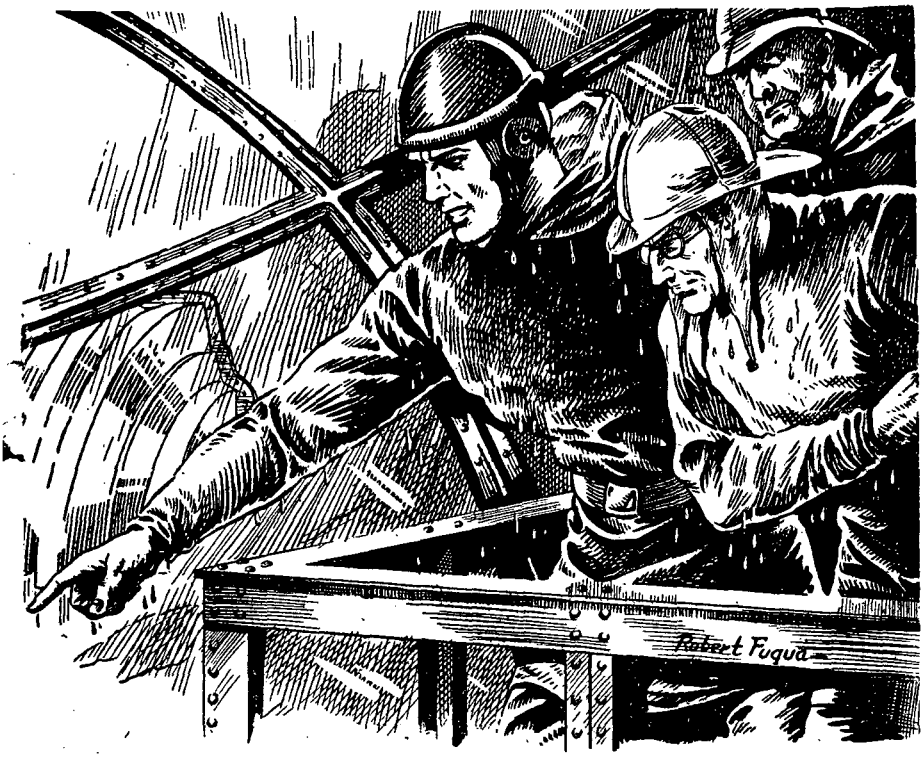

By THORNTON AYRE

Great storms and quakes threaten civilization. Science is baffled until Terry Marsden uncovers an incredible mystery in the Sahara

CHAPTER I

Extreme Measures

BENEATH a sky darkened to twilight gloom with lowering, scudding clouds, battling into the teeth of blinding rain, Elsa Dallaway made her way across the broad, pool ridden expanse of tarmac to the Receiving Station of the Dallaway Stratosphere Corporation.

The whirling of the wind whipped her heavily mackintoshed figure along relentlessly, slammed her breathless against the door of the building. A shower of drops and a triumphant screech of wind, then she was inside, dripping water onto the spotless wooden floor.

"Whew!" she gasped, tearing off her sou'-wester and patting disturbed masses of black hair into place. "Another glorious day, Terry!"

Terry Marsden did not look round, or answer. Surprised, the girl glanced at his broad, gray shirted back and blond head. The sight of clamped earphones explained the reason. A brown hand was skillfully operating the radio apparatus.

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The girl waited, pulled off her mackintosh and wandered across to the bench where he was working. Terry became aware of her presence as the solitary electric light caught the huge, queer stone of the ring on her right hand. Somehow one always became conscious of Elsa Dallaway by that ring before coming to look at the girl herself. It picked up light in startling chromatism.

"Oh, it's you!" Terry tugged off the phones and threw them down, smiled up at the girl. "I was just listening to the record of disasters coming through . . ." He paused, his deep blue eyes serious. "Elsa, do you realize that it has been raining now for twelve days and nights without ceasing?" he asked ominously.

"It does seem a long time since I had a sunshade out," the girl admitted, reflecting.

"It's getting darned serious! First the great Chinese earthquake which upset the atmosphere so badly that the weather fell to pieces. Then the eruption of Vesuvius; and on top of that the complete explosion of Stromboli's crater. Thousands of lives wiped out, oceans heaving up, land sliding down—Tempests and tornados . . . and the rain . . ."

Terry stared at the gloomy window as the screaming wind hurled the deluge against it.

"The Mississippi overflowing and the Hudson rising hourly," the girl finished with a sigh. "Yes, Terry, it is all very terrible— But it'll stop!" she added brightly. "It always does. Just a disturbed spell, that's all."

"Hope so. . . ." Terry glanced up at her quickly. "Incidentally, what brought the wealthy owner of the Dallaway Corporation to see her ace pilot? Not the weather, surely?"

"No. I dropped in to tell you that you're liable to be without relief during the lunch hour and will have to hang on here. We just got the news that Carlton was involved in an auto accident this morning— So bang goes your chance of relief man."

"You could have phoned that news to me."

"Oh, sure—but I couldn't have phoned you your lunch." Elsa smiled naively. "Besides, this seemed as good an opportunity as any to have a few moments with you."

Terry chuckled, got to his feet and held the girl in his arms. Steadily he looked into her clear gray eyes.

"You know, you're the living proof of the fact that business and pleasure can mix," he said at last. "Gosh, Elsa, if anything were to happen to you I'd go nuts!"

"Why wait for something to happen to me?" she smiled.

"Ouch! But on the level, I—"

Terry broke off, immediately businesslike again as the short wave radio, directly contacted with the Department of Public Safety at Washington, burst into life. Quickly he switched from headphones to loudspeaker.

"Attention all air pilots and stratosphere fliers! Orders from the President! All heavy type storm airplanes will prepare for take off in sixty minutes, will leave fully equipped with storm recording apparatus. You will travel from New York to Los Angeles and back again, determining as you go exactly what air currents and velocities are in force. Detailed analysis of abnormal weather conditions must begin immediately . . .

"Stratosphere Corporation pilots! You will ascend to the hundred mile limit and take a detailed survey of conditions, together with full recording of cosmic wave intensity in an endeavor to discover if cosmic waves are

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in any way responsible for the present conditions. Your findings, when made, will be immediately forwarded to the Science Analysis Department of Public Safety. That is all."

Elsa glanced at Terry in startled wonderment as the order ended.

"Say, things must be pretty bad to demand such measures!" she exclaimed. "And from the President himself, too!"

"Of course they're bad! If rain and tidal waves don't let up soon the whole of civilization is going to be inundated—believe me!" Terry paused, rubbed his chin worriedly. "This is going to be awkward. I'll have to go up, of course, but now Carlton's out of action I'm without a relief assistant. . . . Maybe Davies will do."

He moved to the headquarters telephone, then turned surprisedly as Elsa caught his arm.

"Reporting for duty, sir!" she said with mock stiffness, saluting.

"Huh? Hang it all, Elsa—"

"Oh, break down!" she expostulated. "Haven't I been told every thing there is to know about our stratosphere globes? Didn't dad drill it all into me before he died? I'll make a better flight assistant than anybody—and nobody can say anything when I'm the head of the entire Corporation."

Terry hesitated a moment, then nodded quickly and patted her arm.

"Good girl! Nobody I'd rather go with, of course. I'll have Davies come here to the radio instead. Hang on here while I tell the boys they'll be wanted."

He hurried into his flying kit, went out into the raging storm with a shower of raindrops and slamming door.

CHAPTER II

Tragedy

THE STRATOSPHERE CORPORATION, founded in 1950 by Douglas Dallaway, himself the creator of the first practicable stratosphere globe, had in its fifteen years of progress produced an army of scientific pilots whose motto was—progress and obedience.

The huge organization, maintaining a constant air service in the higher levels of the atmosphere, together with a perpetual Government contract for the carrying of express mails, entirely respected the orders of Elsa Dallaway as chief of the concern. Terry, for his part, as the ace pilot, was undisputed boss of the engineering and flying side of the business.

His orders to the pilots in the mess rooms were accepted without questions, even though the danger of flying in such weather was pretty considerable. Though it was mid-day, the gloom outside resembled that of late evening, clouds hanging low, rain sweeping down in torrents, into the midst of which gradually moved the huge globes of the stratosphere machines from their hangars.

Terry used his own machine, equipped with the new Hawkins-Wilson firing cylinders, and thereby able to ascend into the higher levels of the atmosphere at enormous speed. . . . By the time the sixty minutes were up he and the girl were seated in the small, circular control chamber, their scientific instruments grouped around them. At Terry's radio signal the other globes of the squadron began to rise into the midst of the howling storm.

Terry watched them critically for a moment, then turned to his own controls, released the electric circuit which fired the undertubes. Instantly the globe swept smoothly upward in a straight line, held firmly by a master hand on the controls amidst the buffetings of the tempest, increasing every foot of the way.

Rain swamped against the windows

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as Terry and the girl stared fixedly out on the approaching ceiling of angry nimbus. Wind screamed wildly in every tiny crevice of the globe. . . Then they went through the midst of the nimbus and the rain changed to dense, writhing mist.

Up and up. . . . The clouds seemed unending.

"Sure is plenty of upset in the atmosphere to make clouds this dense," Elsa said briefly, getting up from her chair and moving to the recording machinery.

"Umph," Terry acknowledged, his entire concentration devoted to the task of controlling the vessel.

The globe left the clouds at last, plunged up steadily through the troposphere into the stratosphere. Here at last the sun came into view, searingly brilliant in a purple sky, its prominences and corona plainly visible.

Terry slowed the vessel climbing, began to move forward with gathering speed in the rarefied heights. His floor reflectors gave a view of the earth below shrouded from end to end in whirling gray clouds. Somberly he studied them.

"Guess I never saw sky like that before," he sighed; then swinging round, "Anything queer registering in the instruments?"

Elsa shrugged her slim shoulders. She was standing before the main window in the glare of the sunshine, fingering her apparatus and peering at their various recording meters. The ring on her right hand shone with a gleaming blood red fire in the savage brilliance. Unconsciously Terry found his gaze drawn to it.

"Say, you'd better keep your head away from the window," he warned her suddenly. "The globe's walls are insulated to cosmic rays and the sun's radiation, but the windows aren't. If cosmic rays strike through the glass onto the nerve centers of your brain anything might happen. I once saw a guy go raving mad through that."

Elsa smiled faintly. "Guess my brain won't be affected much, anyhow. . . ." None the less she straightened up and sought the protection of the wall. Only her hands, slender and white, were in line with the window.

"Cosmic rays one hundred per cent," she observed at length. "That's normal for this height. Sunspots down to minimum. Wind velocity zero. No other radiations. So I guess the weather troubles are not connected with anything up here. The earth itself must be responsible."

"You're probably right. We'll finish the course anyway and see if there's anything else. . . ."

Terry turned back to his indicator-map, guided the globe entirely by the automatic pointer connected by radio stations on the earth below. By its aid he knew exactly what part of the world he was over. . . . For two hours he drove steadily onwards, came over hidden Los Angeles at last, swung round and started to return home to New York. Below, the scudding mass of gray was unchanged.

Elsa relaxed from her instruments, sat in the padded chair before them and yawned.

"Most unexciting," she sighed. "I'd expected much more!"

Terry slipped the automatic pilot into position and came to her side, sat down. She looked at him in surprise as he raised her right hand gently and stared at the ring on her finger.

"Something wrong?" she questioned.

"Not a thing— But, ever since I first met you this ring of yours has fascinated me. Funnily enough, this is the first time I've really had time or opportunity to see it properly. The brilliant sunshine sets it off amazingly."

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She regarded it critically, turned it slowly so that it flickered lambent, hidden fires.

"Yes, it is rather beautiful," she confessed. "Mother gave it to me just before she died six years ago. She had it from her own mother, and so on right down the scale of ancestors. Lord knows when it first came into being. No jeweler so far has even been able to tell what the stone is. Looks like a mixture of ruby, diamond and opal . . ."

She gave it a little tug and pulled it off her finger, handed it over. Terry studied it curiously and with a shrug finally handed it back.

"Makes the engagement ring I gave you look mighty sick by comparison," he sighed. "In fact I— Anything the matter?" he asked sharply, as he saw the girl was rubbing her finger rather vigorously.

"Nothing at all. Finger feels a bit cramped, that's all. Maybe I tugged too hard getting the ring off. . . ." She forced it back over her knuckle. "Ah! That's better . . ." But she still scratched her finger lazily for quite a time afterwards, relapsed into thought as she did so. Quietness fell on the cabin save for the dull droning of engines.

"Terry," she said at length, slowly, "did you ever feel that the life you are living is just superfluous? That you're really intended for something else?"

He grinned a little. "Well, privately, I always wanted to be an engine driver—but since I finished as a pilot I suppose you might consider my flying superfluous. I missed my real calling—"

"No—no, I'm serious!" she insisted, her eyes earnest. "It's something so much deeper than that! I often feel that somehow I don't really belong to this . . ." She paused, shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, skip it! I'm going moody, or something."

She got to her feet, walked slowly round the little room as Terry returned to his controls. Presently she spoke again.

"Doesn't it strike you as rather stuffy in here?"

"Dunno; is it?" He glanced at the gauges: they registered normal. Puzzled, he turned just in time to see the girl sink slowly into her padded chair and pass a limp hand over her forehead. He could see it was glistening with a sudden dewy perspiration. Her face had gone curiously pale.

"Elsa! What's wrong?" He scrambled out of his chair, seized her arms tensely and stared into her drawn face.

"It's—it's nothing. . . ." Her voice was low, almost fearful. "Just—just that I feel a bit faint, that's all. . . ."

"Faint, eh? This won't do! You've got a touch of radiation sure as fate. I warned you about that window. . . Just leave this to me."

He raised her in his powerful arms, kicked down the emergency bed and laid her gently upon it, bunched up the pillow under her dark head. Then he got to work with sal volatile and oxygen cylinder. The girl revived a little under the combined influence, began to show signs of rising from the near-faint that had seized her.

Terry smiled at her gently. "You'll be okay," he murmured; then turned back to his controls. He permitted none of the anxiety he felt to be registered on his face. Cosmic ray prostration, or even paralysis from unwise soaking in the sun's unmitigated radiation, could produce horrible effects as he had reason to know. But after all she had only had her head near the window for about two minutes. Surely not enough—?

He gave the globe full power, sent it hurtling at maximum capacity through the nearly airless heights,

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watched anxiously as the pointer changed position on the map. Ever and again he shot a glance at the girl as she lay watching him—was rewarded with a curiously tired smile that gave him an inward pang.

Her change from active, jesting energy to languid weariness in so short a time was something he could not properly understand. His relief was unbounded as the pointer hovered at last over the New York headquarters. Swiftly he shifted the controls and began to dive through the gray murk. . . .

In fifteen minutes he had dropped through the whirling clouds into the shattering fury of the storm once more. The globe reeled crazily under the onslaught, was mastered once more by flawless controls, dropped swiftly to the tarmac outside the hangars. Here and there other machines had already landed.

"How now?" Terry leapt to the girl as she lay still.

A trace of her old smile curved her lips. "I—I don't quite know," she whispered. "Funny thing is. . . . I can't feel anything!"

"What!" Terry's effort to disguise alarm was futile. He seized her hand tightly. "Can't you even feel this?"

Her dark head shook. Her gray eyes seemed unnaturally large in her pale face.

"No—not a thing. . . . Oh, Terry, I'm getting scared. . . ."

He caught her behind the shoulders, held her close to him for a moment.

"No need to get scared, sweetheart," he breathed gently. "Just a touch of radiation gotten into you; that's all. I'll have you fixed in no time. . . ."

He laid her down again, swung round to the radio and snapped it on.

"Attention, ambulance quarters!" he barked. "Send ambulance immediately to Globe 47H outside Hangar 92. Emergency case — Miss Dallaway. Hurry!"

He returned to the girl's side, breathed gentle reassurances to her as she lay limply on the bed, then he got to his feet at the approaching scream of a siren. Swiftly he unclamped the airlock, stood aside as two heavily oil-skinned ambulance men came in with a stretcher. Behind them trailed Dr. Arthur Fletcher, the efficient chief physician and surgeon to the Corporation.

"Trouble, eh?" he asked laconically, snatching out a watch and seizing the girl's wrist at the same time. He said nothing when he had finished, merely motioned his men to take the girl out, watched with impassive eyes as she was lifted gently onto the stretcher and taken out under transparent mackintosh.

Terry followed as far as the ambulance, leaned inside it with his anxious face a few inches from the girl's.

"See you later, honey," he smiled. "I've work to finish. Keep your chin up . . ."

"I'll try . . ." Her voice was so low he could hardly hear it. Heedless of the driving rain he watched the doors close, then turned as Fletcher came hurrying past to climb up beside the driver.

Terry caught his arm. "Doc, what is it? Prostration?"

"Guess so . . ." Fletcher shrugged narrow shoulders. "Slow pulse, feeble respiration, partial paralysis. All the symptoms. She'll be all right in a week or two . . ." He paused and narrowed his piercing eyes. "You had no damn right to permit her to go into the stratosphere anyway! She may know globes backwards but she doesn't know the tricks to keep out of danger. Well, see you later. She'll be in the private ward; I'll take care of her personally."

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"Yeah—yeah; thanks. . . ."

Terry moodily watched the ambulance back round then go moving off through the rain and wind to the hospital wing of the vast building. At last he turned and strode away toward his own office quarters.

For the remainder of the day Terry was kept fully occupied. Once he had despatched his reports to the Scientific Analysis Department he was kept busy giving orders for the answering of distress calls endlessly pouring in.

Planes were being lost, vast portions of the country being inundated with flood waters, humanity was being trapped in areas where only storm planes and stratosphere globes could reach them. Hour after hour the tale of rising woe flowed in to him from various sources—nor did the intoned weather reports, given hourly during the existent climatic crisis, give much hope—

"Ceiling zero; wind 86 m.p.h., increasing. Continuous rain all areas. Advise caution to aircraft. Treacherous triple wind currents near all mountain ranges. Visibility 3 to 5 yards."

Several times Terry made fast trips himself to rescue stranded people and bring them to the comparative safety of New York.

By six o'clock, what should have been a normal spring evening, was a chaotic darkness of rain—rain and cyclonic wind that snatched away his breath and pounded him unmercifully as he at last found a spare moment to visit the hospital wing.

Immediately he arrived in the hall the starch bosomed matron telephoned Fletcher. In a moment or two he appeared down the main passage, grave faced and tight lipped.

"Glad you came, Terry," he said quietly. "I was going to ring you. . . . Miss Dallaway is much worse. No use in trying to disguise it."

"Worse?" Terry repeated bleakly. "But—but Doc, what *is* the matter with her?" He kept pace with the active surgeon along the white enameled corridor. "She was taken ill so suddenly . . . so strangely . . ."

Fletcher paused suddenly. "Frankly, Terry, I don't know what's wrong. It isn't cosmic wave prostration at all. It's something that's utterly beyond me; and beyond our instruments too . . ." He bit his underlip, said slowly, "She's dying, boy. . . . I've got to tell you that. Her heart beats and respiration are getting feebler all the time—"

"She can't be dying!" Terry exploded frantically. "In God's name, Fletcher, you can't stand there and calmly tell me that! A young girl like her, full of life and vigor, just dying for no reason— You've got to do something! *Do something!*"

"I'm doing all I can." The specialist tried to look calm. "You know I am—"

"Where is she?" Terry glared hungrily round and Fletcher silently opened the door of a private room. Slowly Terry went forward to the silent figure in the bed, glanced in fearful horror at the significant screen and oxygen cylinder standing by the bedside.

In the moment that he stood gazing down on the girl he knew Fletcher was right. Elsa was waxen looking, motionless, her long lashes lying on her ashy cheeks with scarcely a quiver.

"Elsa—dearest. . . ." Terry took her white, cool hand, looked down briefly as his fingers encountered that blazing ring.

"Elsa, it's me—Terry. . . ."

Very slowly her eyes opened. Their gray depths seemed misted, clouded by the unknown. Slowly her lips moved.

"Floating, over stormy waters," she whispered softly. "Terrible landslides

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—volcanic eruptions. . . . And the wind—! Merciful Heaven, the wind . . ." She shifted uneasily, her eyes staring into vacancy.

"Elsa!" Terry implored brokenly. "Please speak to me!"

He glanced up haggardly as Fletcher shook his head quietly.

"Delirium," he murmured. "Been like this for two hours now. She doesn't know you; doesn't even know herself. Keeps on talking about sand and floods and wind. . . ."

". . . A city, so beautiful . . ." she whispered. "So beautiful, and yet— It crumbles. Down it goes. . . ." She stopped speaking, made a sudden writhing movement and clutched her throat. Instantly Fletcher was by her side, holding the oxygen cone over her mouth. She gasped noisily, struggled with a fierceness that made Terry wince to behold it.

He caught her hand, was suddenly aware that she had ceased making a noise, that the hand was deathly still. Dumbly he stared down on her. The cone had been removed now. Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes closed.

It seemed to Terry in that moment that the whole world turned inside out. Blinding tears obscured his vision. The sheet rising over the girl's face, the scream of the wind, the drumming of rain on the windows—

"Dead!" he screamed suddenly, pounding the bed rail. "Oh, God, no—! No, Fletcher! No, she can't be dead . . . *mustn't* be!"

The specialist's face seemed to dance in mist. His powerful hand closed on Terry's shoulder.

"She *is* dead, Terry," he said gently. "Please, I beg of you, try and control yourself— These things have to be faced."

"Without reason? Without cause? Don't hand me that!"

Things went blank for Terry thereafter. He did not faint, he did not scream. Subconsciously he had hold of himself again, but grief had deadened him to all external happenings. He had a hazy recollection that he went out of the hospital and walked and walked until he was soaked to the skin through his leather clothes. . . .

He walked and walked interminably, and the hurricane seemed to bear in its moaning breath the spirit of the girl who had died but a few short hours before.

CHAPTER III

Mystery in the Sahara

TERRY could not piece anything together for days afterwards. He remembered that it seemed to rain eternally, that clouds constantly scudded over the sky. All thought of work was dashed from his mind. . . . His chief recollections were bitter ones—were those of following a great funeral cortege behind the mourners from the Corporation, of seeing the coffin carried amidst blinding rain into the Dallaway mausoleum on the hill top ground which marked the boundary of the immense Dallaway estate. The stone sarcophagi of the girl's ancestors; her own tomb— It was more than he could stand.

Died from heart failure, Fletcher certified. Heart failure? In a girl so strong and active? Terry's mind revolted at that . . .

The day after her burial in the mausoleum the rain ceased. Drenched landscapes and flooded cities lay under scudding clouds through which a weak sun was trying to shine. Terry began to rise out of the miasma into which he had been plunged. Little by little he took a hold on himself again, faced once more the battle of life. But with Elsa gone nothing really mattered.

The proving of her will, rushed

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through at express speed because of the countless things contingent on it, revealed that Terry was the new owner of the Corporation, a thought which pleased him, though he extracted no happiness from it. All he could do was try and guide its destinies in the way the girl would have wished.

As days drifted by and Terry took up his new post in the girl's former office as chief of staff, there came fresh news of disaster—of terrific volcanic eruptions by Vesuvius and Krakatoa, together with tremendous earthquakes in other zones, followed by another unceasing downpour of rain in nearly every part of the world. As he heard the news Terry could not help but remember Elsa's dying words—

"Terrible landslides—volcanic eruption . . ."

A vision of the future perhaps as she was near death? He shook his head bitterly; went back over her strange words in the stratosphere globe, her feeling of superficiality. Was there any conceivable link between these happenings and—?

"Hallo there, Terry!"

He looked up with a start, his chain of thought broken. It was Boyd Conway, his burly successor as chief pilot, who clumped into the office. With a sigh of relief he pulled off his helmet and released a wiry mass of ginger hair.

"Things pretty bad," he commented, perching on the desk and looking at Terry with serious brown eyes. "We've just had reports through from the Analysis Department on our findings a few weeks back. Seems the chances of sunspots or anything like that causing the present upheavals is most improbable. Whatever it is it's in the earth itself."

Terry nodded idly. "So I figured. What about Munro? What's his angle?"

Conway grinned at the mention of the Corporation's master scientist.

"Oh, he's having the time of his life—and he's doped out a pretty reasonable theory too. He says that every four thousand years or—probably less—the Earth undergoes immense inner changes in its structure—pressures change, stresses alter. . . . You know, the idea worked out by Soddy several years ago. Well, most of the pressure being sealed inside the Earth, it has to have an outlet sometime. During the four thousand year period certain parts of the pressure dribble off through volcanoes and so forth, but there comes a time finally when this is not enough and the pressure inside gets really tough. Then things happen.*

"But that wouldn't cause all this rain," Terry objected.

"No, but it causes the landslides and earthquakes. The rain is the direct outcome of enormous quantities of hot vapor from volcanic blasts stri' ng the cooler levels of the upper atmosphere and thereby producing condensation."

Terry nodded moodily. "I get it, And if it goes on much longer where are we all going to be?"

"Drowned, I guess. . . ." Conway smiled twistedly at the thought; then he glanced up expectantly as the radio speaker gave its warning signal.

"Attention, Stratosphere Corporation! Despatch one hundred globes immediately to western Africa and remove all possible people to nearest zone of safety. Severe earthquake has caused the Mediterranean Sea to overflow Libya and it is now sweeping over the Southern Sahara to Nigeria. Set-

* Munro's theory is undoubtedly correct. Geological data shows this has happened before; the earth went through such a period about the time of the last Deluge. Whole continents went down and others went up in the struggle by the Earth to release its inner forces. A balance was reached, at the expense of huge geological changes.—Ed.

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tlers and new colonists are in great danger. Ordinary planes unable to cross storm areas raging in the Atlantic. Depart immediately. Message ends."

Conway sighed and stood erect, pulled on his helmet again.

"More trouble! I'll be seeing you, Terry."

"O. K. Keep in touch with me over the radio."

The door closed behind Conway and Terry turned to stare again at the great windows as the rain washed inexorably against them.

IN the two days of rain which followed, it became more and more evident that disaster was creeping over the world—disaster so wholesale that scientists found themselves hard put to it to explain the reason.

The report of Whitaker Munro, chief scientist, was generally accepted as the correct one. Inner earthly pressures, pent up through ages except in unsatisfactory escapes through volcanoes and geysers, could no longer be denied. Vastly superheated gas in the earth's core was expanding relentlessly, and in consequence something had got to go. The shift in the earth's rind was, by comparison with the main pressure, almost infinitesimal — but it was quite sufficient to cause unparalleled havoc. The merest rise or drop in supposedly solid land, when it takes place in an instant, can shatter man's creations entirely.

Hour after hour, day and night, reports screamed through the tortured ether, filled earth's peoples with horror. Already South America's greatest cities lay in ruins; thousands of people were fleeing before the greatest floods in history as Atlantic strove to meet Pacific across the quaking, crumbling country.

The same upheaval sent titanic tidal waves crashing inward on all the western coasts of the States, produced an inevitable flood which roared inland as far as Nevada and Idaho. The Bering Sea was advancing inexorably into Siberia; Greenland was subsiding hour by hour. Far out in the middle of the Pacific a new and tremendous tableland was forming. All earth's geological formation was altering, sweeping untold thousands to doom, smashing away the creations over which mankind had labored for generations.

So far New York was untouched. Most of the eastern American seaboard had escaped, beyond the incessant rain which flooded the streets and made it next to impossible for the sewers to carry away the weight of water. Inevitably they would finally block themselves up, then indeed serious trouble would begin.

Terry, in the Corporation building, was not in such a bad position. His quarters were in the building itself; everything he needed was supplied by the vast place. And further, the great walls around the building, together with the solid gates, were sufficient to keep any flood waters at bay for many days if necessary.

Most of the time he was kept constantly occupied in arranging for rescue work. In the few quiet intervals he wondered how Conway was faring on the African job, a wonder which deepened to genuine alarm by the third day and there was still no news. Then around 2:00 o'clock Conway's clipped voice came over the short wave radio.

"Terry?"

"Speaking," Terry answered, fingering the dials. "What's the matter? Where've you been all this time? Moving the people?"

"Got rid of them a long time ago; the rest of the squadron will be home any time now. I got separated from

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them in the storm and went over the Northern Sahara— Right now I'm in the middle of the desert and it's raining like hell. In fact I shouldn't be at all surprised if the whole desert goes down one of these days and forms the bed of an ocean."

Terry frowned at the instruments. "Well, what the devil are you taking such a risk for? Come on back!"

"Not yet. Give me time to finish, can't you? Truth is, I've found something queer—it's been revealed by the earthquakes and unexpected flooding around these parts. I've found a metal dome in the sand, some sort of metal that's tougher than anything I ever struck. I guess only a flame gun would go through it. This dome's about forty feet across and the base goes down into the sand. Must have been buried for centuries. Seems to me it ought to interest Munro, and you too. How about it? Can you come and bring equipment with you?"

"Well, I don't know what you're rambling about, but I'll come," Terry answered. "I'll drive a globe over myself. I'm about the only one to handle it in this storm. Munro's no pilot."

"O. K. Radio me when you're near Africa; I'll direct you."

Terry switched off and puzzled to himself for a moment. Dome in the Sahara? He shrugged, switched over to the science department and contacted Munro. Ten minutes later he arrived, accompanied by Dawlish, his assistant, carrying various small but efficient scientific instruments.

The six foot four, bald headed scientist was in ecstacies. He rubbed his long clawlike hands together eagerly.

"Dome in the desert, eh?" he breathed gleefully, his pale gray eyes losing something of their frigidity. "Is that something!"

"Probably a mirage," growled Dawlish, his round, fleshy face anything but pleased. "The idea smells if you ask me."

Terry grinned faintly. "So far as I know, Munro, Conway really thinks he's found something. We'd better go and look."

"Most decidedly!" Munro struggled into oilskins, flatted down a sou'wester over his dome. He looked oddly like a lamppost wrapped in cellophane as he swung to the door.

"Well?" he demanded, toothbrush black eyebrows shooting up. "What are we waiting for? Come along. . . ."

Terry waited only long enough to hand over his work to the capable Davies, then followed the scientist and Dawlish onto the rain swept expanse of tarmac outside.

The vast winds and vortices raging in the tortured atmosphere more than once nearly defeated Terry's efforts. The stratosphere globe rolled and pitched wildly under the impacts, gained and lost altitude constantly—but very slowly, due to superb airmanship, it finally began to climb gradually over the storm areas, higher and higher into the angry gray that was the afternoon sky. Up and up to the calmer heights, until at last the wind dropped and Terry felt safe to drive forward.

He gave the machine maximum power, hurtled through the nearly airless spaces to the east, right out across the Atlantic, hidden under its boiling scum of storm clouds, guiding the course entirely by the map's directional pointer. Half way across the ocean a squadron of globes hove out of the distance—the rescue fliers returning from the African excursion. Briefly they flashed a signal of greeting, then continued on their way.

One hour, two hours, three hours—and the three thousand mile trip over the Atlantic began to near its end.

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Terry drove down into the murk, staring anxiously at the pointer, then through the rain smeared windows. The wind here was not so strong, nor the deluge as severe. None the less the old North African aspect of blazing sunshine had gone—the whole landscape lay under scudding storm clouds as the globe dropped below them and swept at decreased speed over the vast wastes of the Northern Sahara.

Terry snapped on the radio. In a few moments he was speaking to Conway and following his directions. In half an hour his lone stratosphere globe loomed up in the distance, seemingly unusually small by comparison with the massive dome standing in the background against the stormy sky.

"What the Sam Hill is it?" breathed Dawlish in amazement, squinting between the raindrops on the window. "Looks like the dome of a buried city, or something."

The lofty Munro shook his head. "Not very likely. No city has been unearthed in the Sahara in all its existence."

"Soon find out anyhow," Terry remarked, bringing the vessel to a standstill.

He scrambled into his oilskins, opened the lock and walked across to where Conway was standing by his own globe. Munro followed up in the wet, sloppy sand, his pale eyes narrowed with interest under his dripping hat brim, Dawlish, carrying the well covered equipment, regarded the towering metal dome in some disgust.

"Meteor, I'd say," he growled. "Been buried under the sand all this time."

"Did you ever see a meteor with rivets in it?" asked Conway significantly, then seeing the looks of amazement he went on, "I investigated further after radioing you. Just under the sand, at the base of the dome, is a complete line of rivets. This top dome is just the end of a huge metal ship of some sort. Maybe even—even a space ship. . . ." He wound up as though he wasn't at all sure of himself.

"Certainly nobody could ever have transported a thing like this into the Sahara," Munro commented, moving toward it. "It must have dropped from the skies, if anywhere."

He studied the metal of the thing closely for a time, finally shrugged his narrow shoulders. "No idea what it is—neither steel nor iron."

"What'll you have, chief?" Dawlish asked briefly. "Flame gun?"

Munro nodded abstractedly, rubbed his pointed chin.

"If the total length of the ship—granting this is part of one—can be judged from this, it must go a tremendous distance under the sand. . . . O. K., Dawlish, get busy."

Dawlish uncovered the gleaming tube of the flame gun and pressed the contact switch. Instantly the internal motor sent a withering line of fire against the metal, set it glowing to white heat in a moment. The men watched through half closed eyes, Dawlish himself staring through the gun's blue shield.

Far swifter than the old fashioned oxyacetylene welder, it carved a large circle out of the metal within twenty minutes, destroying the atoms thereof and converting them into energy. Finally a powerful kick sent the piece of metal tumbling inwards, wherein it clanged noisily and seemed to fall for a tremendous distance.

The men glanced at each other uneasily for a moment.

"Hollow all right," Munro commented. "Hope we didn't break anything."

Turning suddenly he leaned through the gap and flashed his torch around. He withdrew with a puzzled face.

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"Looks like some sort of a shaft," he said. "Or the hollow inside of a long cylinder. Take care in coming through the opening, else you'll drop Heaven knows how far. There's a small ledge just below the gap we've made, part of the join in the metal where the rivets are fitted. Wide enough to stand on, with care. Follow me."

He went inside the opening and vanished presently from sight. Terry followed him up, found he was indeed standing on a narrow ledge, some interior binding ring of the perpendicular ship.

Cautiously he tugged out his own torch and flashed the beam below. At perhaps two hundred feet depth, where the light hardly reached, it was reflected back to him with a faint glitter.

"Glass?" he asked Munro—but the lanky scientist had found a metal ladder in the wall and was already clambering down it, his torch waving erratically. Half way down the abyss he stopped and shouted, his voice echoing weirdly.

"Say, there's a manhole lock right here. Must be about a hundred feet below desert level. . . ." Silence for a moment, then, "It must be locked on the outside; no sign of a clamp or screw here—only a sort of automatic device."

He continued the downward climb again, Terry now following suit. Immediately above him, treading warily, were Dawlish and Conway.

Terry stopped at last as he alighted on a curved wall of transparency that was clearly glass. For a long time he and the others flashed their torches round, studying the massive gyroscopical bearings in which the entire internal glass globe was supported, so designed that it swung upright no matter how the outer case twisted and turned.

"Look down there . . ." murmured Munro, and his beam passed through the glass under his feet to train on a neat and orderly control room, a mass of machinery grouped at one end and connected to a switchboard, before which stood two metal chairs.

"It's a space ship all right," he went on pensively. "I wonder if it is possible for—" He stopped abruptly as Terry's torch beam flashed idly down. Suddenly he gasped out, "Say, what's that? A little more to the left—*There!*"

Silent, utterly dumbfounded, the quartet stared down. To the left of their position, lying on the floor of the globe, was a motionless figure—the figure of a girl, bare arms outflung, her slender form draped in the briefest of garments, her feet encased in dainty sandals. Black hair lay draped around her shapely head.

"A woman!" Munro looked up in blank amazement — then recovering himself he hit the glass forcibly below him with his heavy boot. It made not the least impression. Irritated he swung to Dawlish.

"Flame gun, man—quick! The glass is as tough as the metal. Come on."

"O. K.," Dawlish grunted. "But I don't see a few minutes longer will make much difference to the dame. She must have been here since the Sahara was born, anyway." He angled the gun and released the switch.

The glass was by no means easy to break even under the blasting power of the flame gun, but it did finally fuse and begin to splinter, melted queerly and dropped huge globules of boiling substance below. Air sighed into the hole.

During the operation Terry glanced further along the dome—beheld the piece of metal they had smashed out of the ship's wall. The glass had not even cracked under the impact.

"Right!" breathed Munro suddenly,

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and slid through the gap in the glass, dropped the twelve feet to the floor below—likewise glass. One by one the others followed him, stood at some little distance in the stuffy, circular chamber, gazing at the motionless girl.

"What do we do now?" asked Dawlish uneasily. "I'm all for getting out of here. It's giving me the jitters."

Nobody spoke. Terry went slowly forward, torch firmly clamped in his hand— But long before he reached the sprawling girl he stopped in frozen wonderment, the circle of the beam playing on her outflung right hand. On the second finger was a ring, its stone blazing with sullen fires! He'd know that ring anywhere. Elsa Dallaway had been placed in the mausoleum with it on her hand. . . !

Mistaking Terry's motionlessness for uncertainty, Munro strode forward, gently caught the girl under the shoulders and turned her over so that her face fell in the area of light. Immediately he dropped her, even his scientific calmness shattered.

"My God!" he whispered hoarsely. "My God. . . ."

"It's—it's Elsa!" Terry screamed suddenly, twisting round from staring at that dead white face and closed eyes. "Oh, Heaven, it's Elsa! I can't stand this place, Munro; I'm getting—"

"Take it easy, Terry!" Conway came up grimly from the shadows, seized Terry's arm in a grip of iron. "Don't go off half cocked!" he snapped. "This can't be Elsa; all reason's against it. She's in the mausoleum. Relax, I tell you!"

Quivering with emotion, Terry made a terrific effort to master himself. He turned back dumbly to the still, beautiful figure on the floor, let his torch rays play on the face. The girl resembled Elsa to the last detail, looking just as she had in her tomb. The only difference lay in the clothing. Gingerly he touched the slender bare arm—then he recoiled with a sudden gulp of horror as the girl shivered momentarily, trembled, then collapsed into a mass of dust which swirled in the wet wind blowing down through the two holes from the exterior. . . .

A tinkling noise, and the ring fell from where the hand had been to lie in blazing solemnity.

Stunned, the four men stared fixedly at the spot from which the girl had utterly disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

The Meaning of the Jewel

AT last Dawlish spoke.

"Chief, we're seeing things!" he cried dismally. "Please let's get out of here!"

"Four perfectly sane men can't see things," Munro retorted, his pale eyes contracted in thought. "Use your brains, man! This space machine has been sealed under the desert sands for Lord knows how long. No air has been able to get inside this double shell. That girl probably died in the first instance from suffocation, after which she just lay where she'd fallen for thousands of years. She couldn't decay visibly because of lack of air—but the instant air surged in normalcy reasserted itself. Long extinction passed suddenly to its normal state and she just collapsed to dust, her clothes going with her. Other things will start to deteriorate rapidly as well, but of course machinery is tougher than flesh and blood and fabric."

He bent down and picked up the ring, turned it over musingly under the torch beam.

"At least that's Elsa's ring!" Terry whispered, staring at it. "I'd know it anywhere."

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Munro laughed shortly. "Then your powers of observance are mighty poor. I had occasion many times to see Miss Dallaway's ring at close quarters before she died—and it differed in one degree from this one. The claw on this stone has six prongs; hers had only four, like a massive solitaire. Identical stone, certainly, and just as unclassifiable as hers. Another thing, her ring was a trifle too large; this one is a tight fit—or rather was."

"Then—then the girl?" Conway asked in bewilderment. "I'd swear anywhere that it was Elsa Dallaway."

"An uncanny likeness, I admit. . . ." Munro frowned. "For a moment I was completely deceived myself— But consider!" he went on impressively. "Forgive the gruesome details; they're necessary. Miss Dallaway, by this time, will be in a state of visible decomposition in the mausoleum. Even if by some mad fluke we admitted that she could have been transported here, nothing so ordinary as fresh air could have accellerated her decomposition so much as to make her vanish into mere dust. Besides, I repeat, the clothes were not the same. The girl who vanished was not wearing a shroud— No, no, the girl was not Miss Dallaway, but practically her twin, wearing a similar ring. Mystery — profound mystery, and somewhere it had a solution. What's more, we're going to find it."

He tugged off his oilskins actively, rubbed his hands.

"Dawlish, throw down a couple of light extensions from the globes on the surface, then we'll be able to see what we're doing. We're going to solve the mystery of this ship if we stop here for eternity. We've food enough in tabloids to last for a month, and there's no time like the present. Let's get started!"

Munro went to work with the air of a master mind, turned all his ruthlessly analytical faculties to bear upon the mystery of the machine. Terry was filled with complete bewilderment, not unmixed with horror. This sudden and incredible happening had only served to stir up the unhappy memories he had been trying to outgrow.

Dawlish and Conway, having no emotions to overcome, went about their part of the business with relentless thoroughness. They made their headquarters inside the vessel, had meals there, slept there, spent all the time piecing the problem together, entirely oblivious to whatever grim happenings were taking place in the world outside. Their only contact with external events was the radio and the incessant howling of the wind down the shaft they had made. Corporation headquarters had been advised that they were busy on an important investigation, and there the matter finished.

One thing soon became evident. The glass globe control room was beautifully poised in the center of the ship itself, swung so perfectly even yet that it tilted gently when the men gathered in a group at one end of the place. The airlock of the glass globe was so perfectly let into the glass, so much a part of it in its sealed efficiency, that it took a surprising time to find it.

Even then it could not be opened—nor would ordinary blows splinter the glass. Only the flame gun did that, and once underneath the globe in the lower part of the perpendicular ship the four made the surprising discovery that the glass door had been locked on the outside—just as had the airlock on the outer shell. Somebody had gone out of the ship, bolting the doors on the way, and had never returned. The girl, shut inside, had died horribly. The discovery of empty oxygen tanks inside the globe were proof in themselves of

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the effort the girl had made to preserve her life, until at last the supply had run out.

In the very nose—the bottom—of the upended ship was a strange contrivance of electrical machines, all cupped in the very core of the nose and attached to a cable leading back through fused terminals in the globe to the internal switchboard. Munro's cold eyes followed the cable steadily, became thoughtful.

"This machinery can't surely be for motive power?" he muttered. "If it were, they'd surely have put it on the floor of the ship instead of in the nose? Wonder why the devil they tilted it on end like this—"

"Say, do you hear something, chief?" Dawlish broke in tensely, and the four of them stood in absolute silence in the reflected light from the illumined glass globe above.

Presently they detected the noise to which Dawlish had referred—a deep, far distant roaring noise seeming an incredible distance down in the earth itself. There was something frightening about it—a suggestion of colossal power, or wind, hemmed in by unknown forces and striving for an outlet. It sounded oddly like a gale blowing through a subway tunnel.

"I don't like it," Conway muttered with an uneasy glance. "It sounds just as though something is going to blow up!"

"In the present state of the earth's interior anything may be causing that sound," Munro answered. "Internal upheavals beyond doubt, the sound being conducted through the ground. It does sound weird, I admit.

"But what puzzles me is this confounded machinery. The more I look at it the less it resembles motive power. Looks for all the world like apparatus for relaying radio waves, though I don't see how the devil that applies."

He studied it again, shrugged his narrow shoulders, then returned to the glass control room and became absorbed in thought before the switchboard. For a long time he studied an object like a camera, its entire squat bulk tapering to an unlensed nozzle. With painstaking care he measured its distance to the two chairs before the control board, sat in the chairs themselves and studied the straps on the arms and back, straps that were already showing signs of rotting now the air had gotten in.

When he had completed his notes on the switchboard he set about the projector again, examined the complex system of clockwork like devices inside it. Apparently satisfied he then took the girl's ring and subjected it to an exhaustive series of tests with the scientific apparatus he had on hand from the stratosphere globe at the surface.

What line his reasoning took none of the others could guess. They only noticed that his work needed the flame gun several times; that at one period he seemed lost in a daze, almost as though he were intoxicated—then, recovering, he went to work again, tight lipped, non-informative, driving to the root of the puzzle with all the cold incisive reasoning of a detective solving a murder.

For two days he continued his prowling, thinking, and examining, only emerging from his pensiveness when Terry, by the sheerest accident, happened to discover a hitherto unnoticed inlet cupboard which formerly had been mistaken for a small pillar by the switchboard. Surprised, he stared at the thin metal rolls that tumbled out.

Instantly Munro pounced on them, took them eagerly to the experimental table and stretched them out, stared down on them with the others gazing eagerly round him.

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"Hieroglyphics—not unlike Ancient Egyptian," breathed Conway. "Looks as thought they've been done with a stylus, or something. Metal instead of parchment."

Munro's bald head was nodding slowly. "Hieroglyphics that may explain the whole knotty problem," he muttered. "I guess the only person likely to solve them is Wade, back at the Corporation. Dead languages and codes are his only delight in life—Hallo, what's this?"

He had turned to the next metal sheet and frowned over the diagram thereon. It represented a perfectly drawn, rather pointed ellipse with a circle in the center, poised perpendicularly over something that resembled a cylinder, at the base of which was another, smaller ellipse around which were grouped objects that might be machinery. At the base of the cylinder were wavy lines.

"Say, it's this very space ship!" Terry exclaimed suddenly. "Look, this round thing in the center of the perpendicular ellipse is this globe we're in right now. The ellipse is the ship, and the cylinder it fits in is tapered all the way down so that the ship is wedged at the top. Guess I'm stumped, 'specially the wavy lines."

"Given time I can probably work it out," Munro said briefly. "You, Conway, had better take this hieroglyphic message back to headquarters and get Wade to work on it right away. Radio to us the minute you know anything. Now get going."

"Right!" Conway took the metal sheets and departed swiftly, leaving Terry and Dawlish watching intently as Munro turned to the next metal sheet—the last one. It had engraven upon it the unmistakable formation of a city. Munro stroked his chin; Terry stared at it fixedly, a memory of words drifting like a forlorn echo across his mind.

"A city so beautiful. It crumbles . . . down it goes!"

A city? Elsa Dallaway? The woman who had crumbled to dust? Two rings. . . . He shook his head wearily, wandered off across the room as Munro settled down to another long spell of concentration.

Munro brooded throughout the remainder of that day, was still tireless when Terry and Dawlish made up their makeshift beds and gratefully lay down. Only one solitary globe illumined Munro as he sat in thought, his bald dome shining like a great egg, his eyes mere chilly marbles as he stared into space.

Terry closed his eyes, listened to the eternal whining of the wind down the great shaft and, below it, subdued yet insistent, the muffled, thundering mystery that lay beneath the space ship's nose. He began to doze, began to dream—

Then he was suddenly and violently awakened. Wincing in the light of the solitary globe he stared up into Munro's face. For once the scientist was actually eager, shaken out of his dispassionate calm. Dawlish still slept heavily, emitting the snores of one at peace with the flesh.

Munro squatted down, tugged out a foul pipe and lit it. Solemnly he said, "Terry, I think I have it—at least part of it."

"You have!" Terry sat up wakefully, silently forgave the violence of his departure from slumber.

"Right now," Munro said slowly, "we're sitting over a shaft some five miles deep, up which are trying to escape Earth's inner forces in all their fury. Only they can't because a gigantic valve of metal—probably the same incredibly tough metal of which this ship is made—holds them back. Only an atom smasher can fuse this metal,

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not mere pressure alone, no matter how strong."

Terry stared blankly. "You sit there so calmly and tell me that!" he gasped. "What the hell are we doing risking it? And anyhow, how do you know all this? Who'd be nuts enough to sink a five mile shaft anyway, even if they could?"

"When you've disentangled your anything but clear remarks I'll continue. . . ." Munro had the cold iciness now that always came to him when he was dead sure of himself. "The measurements on the diagram we found show, that by comparison with the ship, the tapering 'cylinder' below its nose—which is actually intended to represent a shaft—is all of five miles depth. The wavy lines are earth strata. It's simple enough to see that the shaft has direct access to the inner furies boiling up from Earth's very core through innumerable seams and natural tunnels. Gases, lava, inconceivable pressures—some of them escaping, but a vast majority held back by a gigantic valve. That is this—" and he stabbed the metal diagram with his pipe to show the small ellipse in the bottom of the "cylinder."

"It is pretty evident that whoever built the shaft knew that it would directly connect with a great natural inner fault extending maybe thousands of miles into the earth—and thereby the main outlet for inner pressures. How this fact was discovered we don't yet know. Now, the machinery sunk in the nose of the ship is of radio design; that we know already. It's operated from the switchboard inside the globe here. In the small power plant is a bar of copper. It's pretty certain the genius who built this ship had solved the secret of atomic energy's inexhaustible power. Using this energy, the switchboard transferred it to the radio machinery, waves were generated, and they in turn reacted on the giant valve at the bottom of the shaft. Under the influence the valve would turn aside into an inlet. See this drawing again. . . . There's distinct evidence of some kind of machinery round the valve. Anyway, that's the way I figure it."

"But," Terry pondered, "if that happened the ship would go up like a rocket before the blast from the shaft!"

"It would go out into space far beyond the pull of Earth's gravity field," the scientist nodded complacently. "Now do you see?"

Terry frowned. "So far as I can make out some master mind planned to use the earth's natural forces to fire this space ship into the void. He had no motive power of his own so created a vast cannon of natural power. But *why*, Munro? What good would it do to just get fired into space?"

Munro debated. "As yet we don't know the reason for this desire to leave earth," he murmured. "One or two facts are clear. The people responsible were definitely Earthlings and not, as I at first thought, inhabitants of another world sojourning here. Nobody from another world could be so like Earthlings as that woman we found. Again, there was once a city around here which finally became buried under sand. Lastly, the people were far ahead of us in scientific knowledge, but even so actual space travel was one thing they had still to solve. The point I stumbled over was the matter of strain on being fired from this shaft. They would hurtle outwards at such a terrific pace that living flesh and blood could not stand it. That's where the ring comes in."

Terry gazed wondering as Munro showed the dissected ring in his palm.

"I tried everything I could think of to get some reaction out of this ring, but I got nothing until I tried it in the range of the flame gun. With the flame gun I

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smashed up a piece of metal, and since the gun works on the principle of forcing electron and proton into contact in order to destroy atoms, it of course produces cosmic waves in the process—a small scale replica of the vast radiation floods going on eternally in outer space. The instant the cosmic waves radiating from the smashed metal reached the stone, a tiny needle actuated by a spring shot out of the ring circlet and just as quickly went back again. After that, I took the ring to pieces.

"Actually, Terry, the stone of the ring is a beautifully made prismatic device, gathering cosmic rays and concentrating them on a mechanism which releases a spring. The spring thrusts out the needle just once into the wearer's finger, then snaps back. Once I had the ring in pieces I saw that the needle was really coated with some fluidlike stuff—in truth an enormously powerful drug."

"What!" Terry gasped blankly. "How do you know that?"

"Remember a period a little while back when it looked as though I was drunk? That was after trying an infinitely small percentage of the needle's contents. Had I taken the whole lot I'd have been utterly paralyzed, I guess. From chemical analysis it is quite obvious the drug is a brilliant combination of chemicals for producing suspended animation— No, wait a minute! Let me finish. The drug lies in one-half of the ring—but in the other half is an antidote and a second spring. That second spring is released not by cosmic waves, but radio waves. The stone can deal with either."

"But—but why all this planning and arranging with a ring?" Terry demanded.

"Quite simple. Let us assume that this plan for firing the ship had succeeded. What would have happened? The occupant is sat in the chair by the switchboard there, presuming for a moment there is only one person present. The pressure is weighing him down as he hurtles through Earth's atmosphere—he can't lift a finger to help himself, can hardly even breathe. The straps are secure round his limbs—So, out into space!

"Instantly cosmic waves surge through the ship, react on the ring stone. Needle stabs, drug fills body and suspends all its faculties, destroys breathing and heart beats—makes it possible for that inanimate mass of flesh to move at frightful speed without any injury to organs. Then what?

"Gradually the ship's speed becomes constant. In that projector by the switchboard is clockwork radio machinery. Without doubt it would be set in action before the start of the journey, timed to release a switch when, by calculation, the ship would have reached a constant velocity and acceleration would have ceased. A radio wave from

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the nozzle like end of the thing strikes dead on those chairs before the switchboard—strikes the ring on our figurative traveler. The antidote works and he revives, none the worse, sets about his plans for a landing and guiding the ship.

"That too could be done easily enough by recoiling radio beams, exerting sufficient pressure in striking a planet to easily swing the ship as desired and break the fall when the desired world is reached. The mightiest difficulty—pulling against gravity from Earth—has been overcome. Now do you understand?"

Terry was nodding slowly, a multitude of thoughts chasing through his brain.

"You've—you've definitely proved the antidote works with radio wave reaction?" he asked slowly.

"Beyond question—but as yet I don't know the wavelength."

"Then the whole thing was really a gigantic effort to leave the earth by automatic means?"

"Exactly. And there were probably two people here—the girl and somebody else. At the last minute something went wrong and the journey was never made. The girl was left to die, and—"

Munro broke off in surprise as Terry gripped his arm tightly.

"Munro, do you begin to realize the truth?" he whispered, his eyes bright with anxiety. "Do you understand what you have found? *Elsa is not dead!*"

The scientist's cold eyes stared back levelly. "Take it easy, Terry! After all—"

"I mean it!" he cried hoarsely. "I remember now! When she came with me on that stratosphere trip she was testing cosmic waves. Her ringed hand couldn't fail to be in the path of them because it was right before the window. Cosmic waves won't go through a stratosphere globe's walls, but they will through the window. Her ring must have been like this one. She got the benefit of the drug—" He broke off, breathing hard. "She did not really die! She only went into suspended animation. . . . Oh, my God, we've got to do something quick! Give her antidote—anything! Smash her ring open and give it to her—"

"What the hell's going on here?" Dawlish stirred among his blankets and looked around blearily. "Let a guy get some sleep, can't you?"

"Never mind sleeping; come here and listen!" Munro snapped; then he turned back to Terry. "Guess you're right about Elsa, Terry. I didn't know the real circumstances about her actions in the stratosphere. Certainly she'd get the full blast of cosmic waves on that ring. We've got to think this out carefully. Can't rush at it. One slip up, and she's dead forever. Can't use the antidote from this ring; I used it all up making experiments."

"Then smash the ring she was buried with!" Terry implored. "Can't you see what it means—"

"Of course I can, but your idea's too impetuous. Smashing her ring may lose the antidote utterly. No; the only thing to do is to analyze that radio projector there and find the exact wavelengths it generates. Then we can either take that projector with us, or else know enough about it to duplicate it. With that idea we can turn the waves on Elsa's ring from the mausoleum itself and, we hope, revive her. Let me see now? In her tomb she has no air— Hmm, not that it matters. To all intents and purposes she is dead. Yes, only thing to do is to find the wavelength."

"What's all this about?" Dawlish de-

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manded.

"Terry will tell you that." Munro scrambled to his feet, tireless as ever. Then he paused suddenly. "Say, we've gotten this far," he mused, "but how the devil did Elsa get hold of a second ring anyhow?"

He turned, shrugging, to the projector and Terry turned to explain matters to Dawlish. He explained very sketchily. One thought alone was drumming through his brain— Elsa Dallaway was alive! Locked in a tomb through some odd twist of time and circumstance which had still to be unraveled.

CHAPTER V

A Race Against Doom

TOWARDS dawn, as Munro still labored over the analysis of the radio projector, the normal portable short wave apparatus suddenly came into action. Immediately, Dawlish crossed to it, clamped on the headphone and began to write steadily. He continued for twenty minutes, then broke the contact and turned..

"Conway, Chief," he announced briefly. "Seems Wade can't solve the puzzle entirely, but he's managed part of it. It is mainly in very old Egyptian and Arabian language, intermingled. He's substituted modern terms for ancient numbers and distances."

Munro took the notes from him and read them aloud:

"'. . . our city is falling into ruins. Few of our people can survive. The three thousand year (?) cycle of surface change is here. . . . Hurricanes sweep by, driving the sand before them —the sand of an ocean bed, the waters of which have receded to smother a vast but fortunately deserted continent. . . . Sand. . . . Our city will perish beneath it. The people do not believe. . . . Thensla and I can escape perhaps — The second planet (Venus?) is a possible world. Yes, we can escape, take a chosen few with us. The few who still do believe. . . .'"

Munro turned the page avidly, went on to the next one.

"'. . . I believe I can accomplish a double purpose. The problem of leaving Earth can be overcome. X-rays (?) reveal fault leading to core of disturbances—five mile (?) division of earth and rock between core shaft and surface. . . . Shaft of five miles (?) could be sunk with valve of *drulux* (some kind of metal? Wade) at its base, operated by radio control. . . . Blast would fire ship into space and release Earth's inner pressure to such an extent that the upheavals would cease. Some of our race would perhaps survive. Three or four thousand (?) years will elapse before it comes again. Thensla, myself, and those who believe will travel to this second world; radio beams will land us safely. Our friends we shall place in suspended animation to commence with. We ourseves will use the rings. I cannot—'"

The message ended abruptly. In wonderment the three men stared at each other.

"So there definitely *was* a city here three or four thousand years ago," Munro breathed. "Buried under the Sahara sands, which were brought hither by hurricanes blowing over the sea bottom of a receded ocean. The people belonged to Earth, were an ancient civilization of tremendous knowledge. And why not? Time and again science has proven the ancients to be far cleverer than we. It is even possible that this race was the basic cause of all past mysteries and miracles. Science, of enormous power, was lost when upheaval swept over the world.

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"Who wrote this record? Was he the father, the husband or the lover of the girl Thensla? We will call him the Recorder, for convenience. And why is Elsa so much like the vanished Thensla? Only Elsa herself can perhaps provide the solution."

"No question of it!" Terry exclaimed. "Even as she lay apparently dying in the hospital she spoke of things exactly matching up with the events described in this record."

Munro debated for a time, said thoughtfully, "Most amazing! May have something to do with Time itself." He shrugged. "However, that we'll know later. What we know now is that the Recorder hit on the sublime idea of saving the earth and blasting himself and those dearest to him into space at the same time. It didn't work for reasons still unknown. But *this* time. . . . Good Heavens, don't you see?"

"You mean that if we release the valve we blow this unwanted ship into the void and expend all—or at least nearly all—of Earth's internal tumults at one go?" Terry asked quickly.

"Of course—even as a locomotive's excess steam escapes by the safety valve. In truth this shaft is the Earth's safety valve because it has direct path to the core. The Recorder's X-ray showed that. On the last occasion the valve was not moved through an unknown mistake and the havoc went on until the pressure escaped through volcanoes and constant earthquake. This time no such thing will happen because we'll release the pressure. At one terrific blast the entire mass of inner gas and steam will go off, hurl this ship into space in the process. What happens to it is, of course, immaterial."

"But we'll have to control it from inside here," Dawlish objected.

"Not necessarily. The Recorder wanted it that way, of course, but there's nothing to stop radio waves operating from a considerable distance, provided they're directed properly. We can, if necessary, shift that valve from as far away as New York. In fact, for safety, that's what we'd better do. The shock of the uprush will be felt the world over."

Munro wasted no further time on words. He turned back actively to the completion of his analysis.

Six more hours brought Munro to the end of his analysis of wires, coils, tubes and controls—an analysis that had filled a comfortably thick notebook. He made no immediate observations on his conclusions, simply fell asleep exhausted. When he awoke again it was late afternoon.

"Well, did you get everything?" was Terry's anxious demand.

"Yes, I got it." Munro rubbed his unshaven chin. "But we'll have to make the apparatus. That stuff there is beginning to fall to pieces. Thing to do is to head for New York right now."

Neither Terry nor Dawlish needed a second invitation. They had their equipment already packed and ready. Quickly they moved to the ladder outside the globe and climbed up to the gray hole giving egress to the surface. The moment they poked their heads up the cyclonic force of the wind thundered into their faces, filled with driving rain and stinging sand grains. Battling against it they gained their stratosphere globe and tumbled inside.

Instantly, Terry moved to the controls, slammed them home the moment Munro had closed the airlock. Tugging and pulling, the globe struggled into the upper reaches, battled through the midst of the clouds to the quieter regions, and onwards in a westerly direction.

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The view was unchanged. Below swirled the eternal boiling scum of clouds. When, three hours later, they dropped once more they were met with a vision of rolling waters entirely inundating vast portions of America's eastern seaboard. The sea, driven with hurricane force and turmoiled by the upset of earthquake and tremors, had spilled over into New York itself, marooning the towering buildings, obliterating the storm-lashed harbors. Presumably the same conditions existed all along the coast.

"We've got to step on it!" Munro cried in anxiety. "It looks as though the whole continent is slowly going down. If only we have the time to release that safety valve we can still save a greater part of it. Get all you can out of her, Terry!"

Terry did not answer. He was already hurling the globe at maximum speed between the towers of Manhattan, staring below on streets that had become rivers, at edifices gleaming with the lashing deluge, on numberless windows through which stared countless faces.

Twisting and turning, he made for the Corporation grounds, beheld them at last with a tumbling lake where the tarmac should have been, the walls standing up in lonely isolation.

"Guess we'll have to float," he snapped out. "Water's through the walls at last. Stand by for a bump."

He brought the ship down with a resounding smacking splash: it reeled wildly, finished on even keel by the weight of its floor engines. A boat started out from the marooned Corporation building, presently gained the vessel's side. It was Conway's rain smeared face that appeared in the opened airlock.

"Been watching for you coming," he explained. "Why didn't you radio—?"

"No time," interrupted Munro briefly. "How are things going?"

"Pretty bad. Practically all the western states have subsided under the Pacific, and—Well, I guess we're isolated here completely, with food fast running low." He stopped, smiled faintly. "Find anything worth while in Africa?"

"Probably the answer to everything," Munro responded. "Let's get across to the building; there's work to be done. How about the laboratories? Still above water?"

"Yeah—but I can't say for how long."

Munro climbed purposefully through the airlock, the others following up behind him.

For days afterwards Munro was a tornado of energy, working now with frantic desperation against time. Fortunately, the laboratories were on the upper floor and, as yet, safe from the flood. The huge self contained building still provided all the necessities of life, but there was no guarantee how long they would last.

Terry fretted around in helpless anxiety, watching Munro urging his radio engineers onward in the construction of two projectors—one a small affair no larger than a good sized valise, and the other an almost exact replica of the apparatus he had studied aboard the sunken space ship. Hour by hour coils were wound with precise number of turns, condensers fashioned, banks of tubes arranged, special long storage batteries manufactured.

Terry wandered from room to room of the building, gazing through the windows onto the surging flood waters, listened over the radio to the events transpiring in other parts of the world. They were reports that carried the news of death and suffering.

In the United States in particular

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havoc was abroad. Overflowing rivers and tempest driven seas were twin enemies, sweeping out entire states with ever spreading waters. Farms, outlying districts, villages and cities were all being cut off from one another. Whole cliffs were collapsing, mountains crumbling under the force of incessant earthquakes, dams cracking under the weight of waters and releasing boiling cataracts into valleys below, before which nothing could stand.

Hour in, hour out, tens of thousands of people were fleeing for whatever safety they could find. America, England, Europe; everywhere it was the same. Doom was fast stalking the bursting, groaning world.

Deeply though the news moved him, Terry's thoughts were mainly on the Dallaway mausoleum. Suppose the flood had reached it, had even drowned the girl as she lay in her tomb? That was the thought that anguished his mind. Of course, the mausoleum was on the Dallaway estate outside New York, situated at the top of rising ground. It was just possible that it might so far have escaped.

For three days he wandered round moodily, then at last Munro burst into the headquarters office, his pale eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"All set!" he announced crisply. "It's been a hell of a job, but we've made it. One beam radio projector is fixed right here in the building, can easily be trained and guided so that its waves will affect the machinery in the Sahara. Range is well over seven thousand miles, and that's ample. The waves of course will affect anything else they impact on the way, but that doesn't matter since, so far as we know, the Sahara machinery is the only apparatus likely to react to that particular periodicity.

"Our own set is smaller, and portable. Can't take any chances: to be dead certain we've got to be within inches of Miss Dallaway. Well, are you ready?"

"Ready and waiting!" Terry followed the scientist eagerly from the office, wrapped himself in oilskins then went down to the waiting motor boat, Dawlish carrying the small transmitter. Conway had stopped behind to release the giant transmitter on the stroke of three o'clock—two hours hence.

Terry switched on the boat's engine, sent the craft chugging actively through the streaming, muddy waters. Steadily they went on through the tumult, rain pouring remorselessly into their faces. Once they had left the confines of the flooded Corporation grounds they headed out city by way of the river-streets, pushed onwards through a natural stormbound Venice across a flooded park, until at last in the somber light of the wild afternoon Terry gave a shout.

"There, Munro! There's the hill! Thank God the waters haven't risen that far yet!"

The scientist gazed at the rising ground in the near distance, the huge granite mausoleum standing in lonely majesty against the storm sky. Further down the slope, the Dallaway residence was flooded to the upper windows, entirely empty of staff. Trees pushed out forlornly from the racing waters.

At last the boat grounded, but some seconds before that happened Terry was out of it and plunging ankle deep in sloshing mud up the slope, bending against the screaming wind and rain, only stopping in breathless anxiety against the sodden heavy oak doors.

"They're locked!" he cried hoarsely, swinging round. "That's something we didn't reckon with — The steward'll have the keys—"

"Be damned to the steward!" Munro

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retorted, gazing under his dripping hat. "I'm ready for this. Dawlish—the flame gun!"

"Right, chief!" Dawlish tugged the instrument out of his oilskins and fired it—The lock on the great doors went out in a blast of blue fire.

Terry strode through the dispersing smoke into the dank, musty interior, tugged his torch out of his pocket and walked with an unconsciously reverent tread between the massive stone sarcophagi grouped around him. He had eyes for only one of them, paused as he came to it and stared at the inscription—

Elsa Judith Dallaway. Born 1940. Died 1965.

"Ready?" Munro asked, coming up with crackling oilskins.

"Suppose," Terry whispered, as Dawlish set down the apparatus, "that we're wrong? That Elsa really did die? I couldn't bear the sight of . . ."

He stopped, stared round the ghostly shadows and shivered a little. The wind howled round the smashed and creaking doors. Through the gray opening yawned the waste of tumbling waters.

"I get it," Munro said sympathetically. "We'll look first. Come on, Dawlish—here we go!"

They both eased their shoulders under the sarcophagus' lid. Gradually it began to rise, slid gently to one side under the effort of steady heaving. At last it dropped off the edge with a shattering crash. Terry waited, not daring to look—then he heard Munro's whispered voice—

"By all the saints, she *does* live! Terry! Look, man!"

Shaking, he stared into the oblong space. There the girl lay, untouched by the slightest sign of decomposition, her shroud draped on her slender figure, white hands across her breast. The ring caught the blaze of the torch and blazed enigmatically. In the time that had elapsed there was no trace of decay in that silent, beautiful figure.

Terry suddenly came to life, looked up quickly.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" he demanded fiercely. "Let's get busy with that radio! Come on!"

Munro took no offense at the sharp demand. Calmly he took the tarpaulin from the small transmitter, switched on the batteries. Not a sound proceeded from the instrument, but a quivering needle on its dial testified to the surge of power emanating from it.

Only the scream of the wind disturbed the men in those moments. Munro's pale eyes never left the instrument; Terry stared in dumb anguish, which turned to slow awe as presently he saw the girl's eyelashes flicker ever so slightly. A few more minutes and her bosom began to rise and fall gently; she drew in air through parted lips.

"She's c o m i n g back!" Dawlish breathed tensely. "No doubt of it now!"

Terry was incapable of speech or movement. He clung to the edge of the sarcophagus with a clutch of iron.

"Father . . ."

It was Elsa herself who spoke, in a tired, faraway voice.

"Father . . . Where are you? It's so suffocating in here. . . ."

The men glanced at one another. Munro switched off the machine and raised a hand for silence. Rigid, they listened. The girl was not yet conscious, was talking like one rising from anaesthesia.

". . . yes, I know, father. We can take those who believe. But the others; they may try and destroy. They . . ."

The girl sighed deeply, was silent for a while—then with a sudden spasmodic effort she started again.

"Father, why are you so long? The

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doors—they won't open. Father—I'm choking! I'm cho—"

Her voice broke off abruptly and at that same instant her eyes suddenly opened, big gray eyes that stared in utter bewilderment in the reflected glare from the torch as Terry turned it from blazing into her face.

"What . . . ?" she whispered weakly. "Where—where am I? Who are you. . . . ?"

"Elsa, it's me—Terry." He bent down, raised her thinly clad shoulders. Gently he raised her bodily out of the dank tomb and laid her on the blanket Dawlish had brought along. For several minutes she was silent, warmly wrapped up, taking the restorative forced to her lips.

"Oh—Terry," she muttered at last. "What—whatever happened? How did I get here. . . ? I dreamed the most amazing things—"

"We'll tell you our story later," Munro interjected quickly. "The main point at the moment is to get a story from you—if you're strong enough to tell it, that is?"

The girl nodded slowly. "I'm getting stronger every minute. What do you want to know?"

"Well, just before you recovered consciousness you spoke of your 'father,' and remarked that you were choking—dying. What did you mean?"

"I hardly know. . . ." Elsa pondered for a while. "Just a silly dream, I guess," she said finally. "I had the strangest conviction that I was a girl belonging to a highly scientific race, owning a great city which was being overwhelmed by storms and earthquakes. My father hit on the idea of saving the world and trying to reach Venus at the same time, by sinking a shaft into the earth which had direct contact with the earth's core. There were rings somewhere; rings like. . . ."

She stopped, stared at the ring on her finger, looked up sharply into Munro's face.

"Mr. Munro, what's happened?" she asked sharply.

"Never mind that for the moment, please. What more have you to tell?"

"Very little; I'm almost forgetting it all now. Oh, yes—I remember! We had everything ready. I was in the space ship, and we were waiting for the few people who were loyal to us to come and join us. They didn't arrive, so father went out to find them. He locked the doors as he went out in case any of our enemies might try to get at me and destroy the machinery. The doors were controlled with a radio key, you understand, and could be opened from either inside or outside—but there was only one key, and father had it.

"I remember I seemed to wait for him an interminable time, so long indeed that the air supply began to give out. I tried to break open the walls that hemmed me in, did all I could to escape. But I failed. I had the idea I was choking—"

Elsa broke off, shuddered. "It was horrible. The worst dream I have ever known."

"Was your name Thensla?" asked Munro very quietly.

The girl looked up in stunned amazement. "Yes—now I come to remember, it was! But Mr. Munro, how could you possibly—"

"Listen, my dear. . . ." The scientist leaned forward, laid a lean hand on the girl's blanketed shoulder. Quietly, with his usual impassivity, he told the whole story, throughout which Elsa sat in motionless silence, too astounded to interrupt. When at last it was over she cried,

"Good Heavens, you mean I was actually thought dead? That's why I'm in this horrible place?"

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"Exactly!"

"Then—then this Thensla? Was it me? An astral projection or something?"

"No, nothing like that. You *are* Thensla, yes, living again. Call it reincarnation, if you wish. We know now why so many scientific things existed in early times. They had their roots with your race, but the storms scattered your people so much that each succeeding generation of children knew less than their ancestors. One girl alone, after untold generations, was born with a clear memory of the past—almost an actual link—and that girl is you, Elsa."

"But—but how? I don't understand!"

"Is it so difficult? Science today almost universally accepts the belief that death does not end the *entity* of an individual. The entity lives on eternally, is manifested again in other bodies, and continues in such a way until, perhaps, it comes back to the starting point—that is if we accept time as a circle.

"At one period you spoke to Terry of your feeling of detachment from your normal existence. A psychoanalyst would have placed your condition as the influence of events early in this life, or in some other past existence. There are, as we know, many people in the world such as you—who can remember things that have no part in their natural existence, who know of places they have never visited. What else but a memory link with a past state? Which one of us, indeed, has not at some time in his life said—'I have been here before!'?"

Munro paused for a moment, and frowned, went on again slowly.

"The original strain of a past life was so strong in you, my dear, that you even carried your physical appearance across the interval of death. You never had any idea of the real cause of your superficial feelings until certain events repeated themselves. The ring, as I have told you, reacted. The moment you passed into unconsciousness you lost all remembrance of Elsa Dallaway; your mind reverted to a time generations before in another life where the ring had figured so prominently. You described in detail events you had experienced in another form.

"Freud, for instance, has said that dreams of a fixed design can be induced by stimulating a sleeper to certain sound or sensations. What is false death—your experience—but a particularly vivid dream, wherein all the circumstances exactly matched up to induce in you the memory of a past event?"

"Now I begin to understand," the girl whispered slowly. "The memory of myself as Thensla, the memory of a great feat to be accomplished, that had ended in failure, has remained with me through the generations. . . ." She stopped, looked up slowly. "But how did I ever come to get hold of this second ring?" she demanded.

The scientist shrugged. "That we can never really know—but we can form two guesses. One is that it was originally worn by your father. He left the space ship, never to return—was lost by some unknown cataclysm, killed probably. His ring was found eventually by somebody, and they wore it. So it was handed down through ages upon ages, until at length, it came to you. That is one theory. The other is that if, as Eddington once said, we move in a Time circle, and must eventually repeat certain predominant actions all over again in sequence, the ring was bound by mathematical law to finally reach you and complete the purpose of the events for which it was intended. Not the

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Secret of the Buried City

By

JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

Rodney Marlow found a metal city buried beneath his farm, and in it the secret of an amazing menace

CHAPTER I
Mystery Metal and a Mystery Girl

RODNEY MARLOW had bought the old farmhouse with its several acres of land with the idea of turning it to profit. He had envisioned fruit and vegetables produced by his expert technical knowledge from the Agricultural College. . . . But the presence of large quantities of old iron under the subsoil rather upset his ideas. In fact, he was distinctly annoyed. Everywhere his shovel touched, wherever his pick drove into sunbaked earth, he encountered more metal. On every portion of his land it was the same, and probably it explained the sickly nature of even the weeds and grass which were unable to form any deep root growth.

"Swell place to sell to a guy!" he growled one morning, pausing in the hot sunshine to mop his face and gaze round with baffled eyes. "Must be an old car dump, or something. . . ."

He meditated for a moment, gazed back at the silent farmhouse, at the lonely country around him—then with sudden savage vigor he whipped up his pick and drove it down with all the force of his young, powerful muscles.

Immediately he jumped back, gasping at the pain stinging through his palms at the terrific rebound. Woefully he stared at his pick; the pointed end had bent considerably under the impact.

"No wonder I got the place cheap," he muttered, then as the pain in his hands began to subside a puzzled look came into his eyes. Something of his anger changed to wonderment. *All* the land metalbound? Definitely! He had driven his pick into almost every quarter of it. Perhaps a foot or so of soil, then metal—rusty and incredibly hard.

Slowly he went down on his knees, stared down into the nearest foot deep cavity he had made. Reaching down his arm he hammered on the metal with his knuckles; it gave back a solid, earthy thud.

"Looking for worms?" inquired a quiet, amused voice behind him.

"Huh?" He emerged with a start, straightened his tumbled black hair. A girl in a cool, summery frock was gazing down at him, swinging a large picture hat in her hand. Her blue eyes were still smiling as he hastily stood up.

"Some—something I can do for you?" he asked, rather puzzled. He had imagined himself entirely alone: his last look round the landscape had revealed

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its emptiness. . . .

"I wondered," the girl said, "if you could direct me to Middleton? I've walked nearly five miles from my home, I should imagine. Once I left the main road I seemed to lose my way," and she jerked her sunflooded golden head back toward the dusty road leading past the farm.

"I saw you here as I came past, and so—" She stopped, waited prettily, still swinging her hat.

Rod wiped his powerful hands rather uneasily down his trousers. This sudden shattering vision of loveliness in the wilderness was rather too much for his peace of mind.

"Sure I can direct you," he nodded. "Take the road straight through until you come to fork roads. Turn due left, and keep going."

"How far is it?"

"About three miles from here."

The girl sighed. "The car would have to break down this very day! I'll have no feet left at this rate. You haven't a car I could borrow?"

"Sorry, no." Rod shook his head regretfully. "You see, I live alone here, and I've no particular use for a car. I walk if I want to get anywhere. But I don't like to see you having to do it," he added gallantly. "I suppose a farm-horse wouldn't be any use?"

"Do I look like an equestrian?" the girl asked dryly.

"Eh? Well—no. But if your mission's important. . . ."

"Not particularly. A friend asked me to drop over and see her on business. The day is all right, but the distance—! I'd no idea it was so far." The girl winced, fanned herself with a wisp of lace and glanced down at her dusty shoes.

"I'M Phyllis Bradman," she volunteered suddenly, and with a certain purposeful movement she took a step back and leaned against the fence, eyeing Rod curiously. He returned the compliment, smiled rather shyly.

"My name's Rod Marlow," he said, shaking her slim hand. "I'm sorry you're put out like this. Guess that if I hadn't spent all my spare cash on this dump I'd have had a decent car to offer you— Some guy must have taken me for a sucker when he sold me this lot."

"What's the matter with it? Something to do with that hole you were peering into?"

"Take a look," Rod growled, and gently grasped the girl's arm as she stared down into the cavity. She seemed unaware of his grip as her thoughtful eyes looked down; he for his part found the contact remarkably alluring.

"This metal's all over the place," he went on sourly. "Doesn't seem to be broken at any point, either. I had visions of orchards and vegetables, and instead I get this. Wish I'd stuck in the auto factory now, boring though it was."

The girl looked at him quickly. Her face was no longer amused; it was serious.

"Do you realize that you may have something here which is far more valuable than orchards or vegetables?"

"Such as?"

"A meteorite, maybe—though I certainly never heard of one landing in this part of the Middle West. Some scientists would give their souls to have what you've got buried right in your back garden."

"They can have it," Rod grunted moodily. "I'm thinking of the money I've lost."

"You might try and get through the metal," the girl said hopefully.

Rod stared at her. "Say, why are you so interested in the stuff?" he demanded. "And where would be the

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sense in just digging through a lot of iron? Think of the time it would take! The season would be finished by then—"

"Listen!" The girl spoke so imperiously that he promptly subsided. "I'm no scientist in the professional sense, but I do know a thing or two about the things they go crazy over. If there is an enormous, hitherto unfound, meteor right here on this land of yours you'll more than get your money back from the Scientific Association. On the other hand, if it's only a great sheet of metal, perhaps from the foundations of some old building, you'll soon find how deep it is after drilling through it. If you come to soil after an inch or so it is an old foundation: if not, then it's a meteor."

Rod rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Maybe you've got something there. I'm beginning to think it's lucky you chanced along as you did—"

"Have you an acetylene torch, or an electric arc welder?"

"I guess not."

"Right!" With sudden activity the girl put on her hat; it framed her sensitive, intelligent face in a lacy halo. "Leave this to me, Mr. Marlow. I've got to go into town anyway, and while I'm there I'll buy an electric welder from Markinson's. They're big electrical people."

"But—but I can't afford things like that!" Rod objected. "Hang it all, Miss Bradman, I—"

"Forget it!" she laughed, moving away. "We're both in on this. Science is a pet fad of mine, anyway. I'll be back sometime this afternoon—and don't be surprised if I've bought a car in the interval!"

She moved to the fence opening and out into the dusty road, leaving Rod staring blankly after her. He had known girls in his time, none of them very impressive—but this one positively took his breath away. Her calm decisions, her beauty, her manifest intelligence—

"Gosh," he whispered, and looked at her slim, retreating figure striding actively away through the sunshine.

He turned to look back at the hole—then once more to the road. But the girl was no longer there!

Dumbfounded, he raced to the rail of the enclosure and stared along the great dusty expanse leading to Middleton. There was not a single corner where the girl could have hidden herself, and yet—

"Gosh!" Rod gulped again. He wondered if he had had a touch of sunstroke. But surely a girl like that could not have been a delusion? If so, he was willing to have more of them. He went slowly back to the hole. The girl's footprints were still visible in the loose soil.

CHAPTER II

An Incredible Discovery

ROD hardly knew how the time passed afterward. Repeatedly, memory of the girl returned to him; it even put him off his dinner. Most of the time he was outside, shoveling away a good clear area from the hole.

Then, toward midafternoon, he looked up with sudden expectancy at the sound of distant roaring. Screwing his eyes against the sunshine he discerned a long trail of dust whirling up the road; something merged out of it—a fast roadster. It stopped at the fence opening with a scream of tires.

"Hallo there!" Phyllis Bradman waved her arm cheerfully, climbed swiftly out of the car and came tripping across to where Rod was standing.

He eyed her rather dubiously, glanced across at the auto.

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"Then you did buy one?"

She nodded. "I can always do with two, and money is no consideration so far as I am concerned. I brought an electric welder along with me, too. You'll have to carry it, though."

"O.K." Rod strode across to the roadster, surveyed its smooth lines enviously, then hauled the heavy welding instrument from the big rumble seat. The girl came up behind him as he lowered it into the shallow hole he had dug.

"I can't begin to thank you—" he began, but she waved her hand indifferently.

"Skip that. Point is, can you work the thing?"

"Sure; it's on the same design as the welders we used in the auto factory. Only wants connecting to the power socket. . . ."

He picked up the surplus flex and carried it back to the plug and socket just inside the farmhouse door. Then he returned and switched the instrument on, took the pair of blue goggles the girl pulled from her handbag. Silently she slipped a pair over her own eyes.

"Funny thing," he murmured, as he tested the savagely bright flame. "I could have sworn something queer happened to you when you left me this morning. When I looked for you down the road you had vanished. Where the deuce did you go?"

"Only on and on," she sighed. "The furthest three miles I ever struck. There's a dip in the road a bit further along, though; and since I stooped to adjust my shoes that's why I probably was out of sight."

"Yeah—maybe." But Rod's voice had no ring of conviction. Innocently though the girl regarded him, calmly though she explained away the mystery, Rod knew that his eyes had not deceived him. Deep rooted inside him was a growing wonder.

Motionless, they both watched the biting core of incandescence from the welder eat steadily into the metal amidst a shower of sparks. Minutes passed, and still it bored steadily downward.

"If this is the floor of an old building it must have been a bank," Rod growled at last. "We've penetrated a foot of metal already, and still going."

"If it is a meteor, it might be solid," the girl observed. "Anyway, go right ahead and we'll see what happens."

He nodded, continued his activities—then five minutes later he glanced up triumphantly.

"It's through! The metal's about two feet thick and as tough as the devil. Won't be long now."

With a new enthusiasm he cut a line, formed it gradually into a square, then as the last piece fused away he thudded heavily on the metal with his boot. The section gave way and vanished below. The sound of incredibly far distant echoes floated upward.

WHIPPING off his goggles he stared at the girl with amazed eyes. Taking off her own glasses she returned his look, peered at the black square. It framed an absolute, ebony dark.

Regardless of the soil and dirt the girl went on her knees beside Rod. Together they peered down. At last their eyes met once more.

"No meteor could be this thick," Rod muttered. "You heard the echo from that fallen metal plate? It sounded miles away. . . ."

He relapsed into thought for several moments, then suddenly snapped his fingers.

"Got it!" Scrambling to his feet he went over to the farm and returned with an enormous coil of strong rope, together with an electric torch. He

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flashed the beam swiftly in the opening, but it failed to reveal anything beyond black, empty space. In silence he tied it to the rope, lowered it down and watched intently. Only when the rope was nearly at its extremity—one hundred and fifty feet—did the torch alight on something solid. What its exact nature was was not distinguishable.

"Smells dank," Phyllis said, sniffing.

"But what the dickens is it?" Rod demanded, hauling the torch back again. "Can't be a disused mine. . . ."

He meditated briefly, then shrugged. "Guess there's only way to find out, and that's go down!"

"But—but suppose something happens?" the girl asked anxiously.

"Have to chance that. We can't leave this hole here and not know what it's all about, can we?"

Rod thrust the torch in his hip pocket, fastened one end of the rope securely to the car axle and dropped the other end into the hole.

"Wait here until I come up again," he said to the girl, and she nodded slowly, watching anxiously as he lowered himself into the hole, gradually vanished from her sight. Lying face downwards she squinted into the dark.

Rod could see her head and shoulders above him as he descended. She grew more remote. He swung in emptiness, the rope sliding gradually through his hands and past his scissored legs. Pausing once, he tugged out his torch and waved it around. Darkness. He sank lower. The hole above became a square star with the girl's head still outlined against it—

Suddenly his feet were scraping something solid. It felt like metal Gingerly he released the rope and edged forward, tugging at his torch as he did so. But the torch jammed in his hip pocket. He tugged at it furiously, then before he realized what had happened his left foot plunged into emptiness and he went flying into space It was impossible to save himself. He seemed to fall for infinite miles, landed at last with a stinging pain through his head. Weakly he collapsed, stunned with the impact.

GRADUALLY, from the mists of oblivion, he became aware of sounds—rustling, metallic sounds, like joints moving in oiled sockets. For a time he lay with his eyes closed, almost devoid of all sensation, save profound bewilderment. The memory of his fall and blow on the head was still in his mind.

The noises seemed to grow stronger. His nostrils drew in the sweetish, sickly odor of powerful antiseptics; he heard the gurgle of water, the clink of glass striking glass. . .

Wearily he opened his eyes, lay gazing in blank wonderment at a shadowless flood of light contrived from somewhere in a metal ceiling above him. His first impression, which he just as quickly dispelled, was that he was in some kind of hospital. But the instruments around him were ahead of those in any hospital, despite the advanced surgery of this year 1967. Further, the objects moving about so gently and putting their instruments away were not living beings, but robots. Three of them—perfectly fashioned creatures of metal, even with strong resemblance to human beings in outline and face, but just the same still mechanical.

Rod sat up with a jerk as the full significance of everything dawned upon him. He winced at the stinging pain in his head. Everything rushed back to memory—the fall, the hole through the metal—Was this, then, the inside of the metal mystery? Through the windows of this particularly replete place he could distinguish other buildings, low

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built, and floodlit, stretching away for perhaps two miles then ending in blank darkness.

Phyllis Bradman? What had happened to her? Was she still waiting above? Shakily he got off the low built bed.

"Say, where the hell am I?" he demanded hoarsely, staring at the nearest robot.

The thing turned, moved slowly toward him. Then it spoke in a metallic voice—strangely enough in English.

"You are Rodney Marlow?" It was more a statement than a question.

"Yeah, sure I am, but who the devil are you? How did I get into this place, anyway?"

"You came near here of your own accord, through the opening you made in our roof. Evidently the outer surface of our buried sphere and city has pushed its way very close to your soil surface. However, that is beside the point. Nothing has lived here for tens of thousands of years. It has all been preserved. Your coming released hidden switches, started things moving again. . . ."

The thing paused for a moment, then the words from its open mouth orifice resumed.

"You stunned yourself when you fell from the steps. In fact you cut your head rather severely. An operation soon restored you to normalcy.

Rod gaped in amazement. He could not find the words to express the questions teeming through his brain. All he could do was stand and listen as the robot went on.

"Only as time passes will you begin to appreciate the truth about this underworld—the reason why I speak to you in your own language, why I am a mere machine. The forces motivating my words cannot, as yet, be understood by you. You will only grasp that when you behold those who sleep in another part of this city. I am their spokesman. Time revealed to us, Rodney Marlow, that you would be the savior of your people—that is, the savior of those people who *deserve* to be saved. . . ."

"How long have I been here? What place is this?" Rod demanded.

"You have been here some three hours. This place is the last habitation of former man—civilization which existed before yours. We retired here before the threat of a vast cosmic disturbance, a disturbance which is about to be repeated. The last men and women of this race still live, but sleep. In due time, Rodney Marlow, you will revive them—but first you have the more urgent task of saving those of your own humanity who deserve to be saved. Certain things must be revealed to you . . . Come!"

ROD obeyed the command dutifully, following the robot from the amazingly efficient surgery into an adjoining building. Its size was enormous; the machines it housed positively breathtaking in their implication. In startled wonderment he gazed around him.

"Be seated, and watch!" the creature commanded, motioning to a stool.

Again Rod obeyed without question, and curious instruments were attached to his head and body. The hidden lights in the great place expired and his gaze transferred itself to a whitely glowing screen. In bewilderment he stared at the vision of a great city, perfectly architectured, reproduced in flawless color. He heard its sounds, smelled its smells, seemed actually present. Tall, slender spires reached to a sky that was curious muddy yellow. Suddenly a large ship — was it a *space ship?* — crashed headlong into a giant building, crumbling it in ruin to the ground be-

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low, with a terrific roar of destruction. Then the view slowly lowered to a well planned street, and there Rod received another shock.

Instead of the activity of busy human beings such as he had expected, he saw instead sub-human looking creatures moving to and fro, the tattered rags of clothing clinging around them. Some of them turned on each other even as he watched, fighting with demoniacal fury. All around on the ground lay dead and decomposing bodies, litter and uncleaned filth.

Again the view changed, swept over seas that contained rotting, drifting ships, over cities that were naught but crumbling skeletons of their original selves. Everywhere, whatever view was shown, revealed destruction and decay of an advanced order.

Then the lights came up again and the screen blanked. The hidden projector ceased its soft whirring. The sounds died out.

"You have seen a movie film of an age long past," the robot explained. "There are of course many other records, but the one you have seen embraces the main facts. The last civilization reached the very peak of magnificence, then save for the few who managed to escape into this artificial underworld, progress ended.

"The earth during its spatial journey ran into the midst of a cloud of meteoric dust, so enormous in extent ten years elapsed before it was traversed. Though it was not dense enough to entirely block solar radiation, it was dense enough to be collected by and dispersed through earth's atmosphere, stopping a great deal of heat from reaching the surface and also preventing the flow of several other vital radiations.

"Pre-eminent among the sun's radiations is the one producing mitogenesis.*

"This solar radiation is responsible for evolution. When the cloud came, the radiation was cut off and evolution stopped. In fact it did more than that; mankind atavized, slid backward down the ladder he had so laboriously climbed. If that seems a strange thing to your mind, remember that a dead body does not just stay dead—it starts to decompose, back into the very elements from which it was born.

"So it was, in a different sense, with human beings. They began to atavize. There were wars, crime, man fought against man. Cities crumbled. Everything in the world save this refuge made by the intellectuals, was wiped out. Man went back to the caveman of the Glacial Age, which in itself was produced by the solar heat blockage. Then the warmth and radiation returned. Man started to ascend once more, right up to his present status—which is still far below the peak we attained.

"And now that same cloud threatens again: only a matter of days separates it from humanity. It will be your task to save as many of your people as you can."

ROD said nothing. Actually he was wondering how the metal walls of this buried city, which had survived geological changes for such a vast span of time, had succumbed to the attack of an ordinary electric welder. Somehow, it didn't make sense.

"Why didn't you escape into space?" he asked at length. "You understood

* Mitogenesis is absorbed and given forth by the cells of all living things, but it is so obscure that no instrument can detect it—though it is definitely there, as your experiments in America, Russia, and England have proven. One way to prove its presence is to expose yeast cells for a certain time to the radiation from other living germs: definite life actions result. The radiation goes through quartz, but not through glass, proving it is basically a chemical effect, and chemical fermentation is of course the basis of all life.—Gerald Herd's "Science & Life."

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space travel?"

"Certainly, but there was not a world we could go to. None of the planets in the system can safely support life, and the chance of finding a world in the outer deeps was too grave a risk. So we preferred to come below and insulate this one spot of Earth against all chances of atavism. Scientifically we duplicated the missing solar wavelength for our own use, but of course it could only be done on a small scale."

"And you say I am to herd my own people down here?"

"Those who are intelligent, who form the nucleus of your world's science and progress—yes."

"Even assuming I can manage it," Rod said slowly, "how shall I know how to carry on when I take over down here? All this is so much mystery to me. I'm not a scientist; my knowledge is by no means great. You spoke of some sleepers; what possible chance have I of understanding their motives and aims? How to revive them?"

"That will be revealed to you." The robot turned aside with another command. "Follow me!"

Rod walked pensively between the grouped machines, halted presently before a device which looked horribly suggestive of an electric chair. Rather doubtfully he obeyed the order to sit within it. Fear gripped him as the lights went out again, save for the dull glow of six red bulbs on a switchboard to the left of him. He heard the soft whir of machinery, then a click—Something moved gently out of the dark and stopped before him, came to life as a glowing rectangle filled with vague, phantasmal shapes.

They represented nothing understandable, but as he watched them, with an hypnotic fixity which he could not by any effort break down, he could feel his mind, his grip on things tangible, beginning to slip. He lost contact with his surroundings; the whole world was a darkness filled with crawling, incredible shapes that, somehow, did something to his mind.

Tremendous ideas began to drift into his brain. He saw hitherto unknown explanations for electricity, gravitation, and other riddles of physics. Engineering and mathematics; those too he fully grasped in their real significance. It was as though knowledge was being poured into him, and strangely enough he retained it all.

When at last he became aware of his surroundings once more his brain was burning with conceptions.

"You believe *now* that you will understand when the time comes?" the robot asked slowly.

"Everything," Rod muttered. "Granting, that is, that I can get people to believe me."

"That is your task, and you will accomplish it."

"Yeah . . . That's right." Rod stood in deep thought for a moment, then he looked up quickly. "Well, I've got to be moving," he said. "I left a young lady up on the surface. She'll be thinking I'm dead, or something. How do I reach the shaft I came down?"

The robot motioned to the open doorway. "When you go through that exit turn left and keep going until you come to steps. Go up them. Your shaft is almost immediately above their summit. You had the misfortune to slip as you landed. . . ."

Rod turned, cast one look back at the robot as it stood motionless against the wall of the vast laboratory, then he walked out into the soft glowing light of the city. Quietly he walked up the wide street, gazed around on the squat but solidly made dwellings. He came

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at last to the steps—dozens of them, reaching upward to a remote square star which he knew was the hole he had burned.

Thoughtfully he began to ascend, the city dropping lower and lower behind him. The glow illumined his path. His mind was still in a turmoil. Ideas were falling over themselves—

At a sudden sound he looked up sharply. A long way above him on the steps was Phyllis Bradman herself, coming swiftly down toward him.

"MR. MARLOW! Rod!" she gasped thankfully, and her voice echoed in the great emptiness. "Oh, thank goodness. . . ."

Rod hurried to meet her. Breathless, she finally joined him, nearly fell into his arms.

"You're alive!" she cried, her eyes searching his face. "When I heard no sounds or anything from you I slid down the rope myself to see what had happened. I found these steps, guessed that you had fallen over the flat summit at their apex. I—I think they're intended as a sort of observational pyramid of steps, or something, and the hole you made happened to come right over them. I saw that city, all aglow, then— Well, I got scared. I didn't dare to call anybody here, and I didn't dare to visit the city either, so I just waited. It—it seemed hours."

Her rush and tumble of words stopped abruptly. Her eager eyes still studied him.

"What happened?" she demanded quickly. "Is it a real city?"

"Kind of—a refuge from the long dead past," Rod answered quietly. "Thanks a lot for coming down after me; I really appreciate it."

"Can I go down there?" she insisted.

"Wouldn't do any good if you did; I can tell you everything. Besides, there isn't time. I've got a lot to do."

"You mean bring scientists and other people?"

"Among other things, yes. You can see the place then."

He took her arm decisively and they returned slowly up the monstrous flight. Certainly the steps looked as though they were intended as a lookout post over the city. Far away in the distance another pyramid reared in similar fashion.

"You're different, somehow," the girl said suddenly.

"Am I?" Rod smiled faintly. "I guess some of the things I saw down there were enough to make any guy feel different. . . ."

They fell silent again, presently gained the still dangling rope. Up above the pale evening sky was visible in the rectangular hole. Rod stepped forward, and at the same instant the glow from the city expired; the darkness of the tomb descended.

"Must be some kind of automatic switch in this platform which stops and starts things," he commented. "Last time I started the city going; this time I've closed it down. I half wonder if I'm not dreaming the whole darned thing. . . ."

Seizing the rope he began to ease himself up it.

"I'll go first," he said briefly. "When I call fasten it round your waist and I'll haul you up."

"All right — but hurry up! It frightens me down here in the dark."

Rod went up steadily, hand over hand, at last reached the surface. In a few minutes he had the girl beside him again. They stood looking at each other in the approaching sunset.

"Queer, isn't it, the things we've done since morning?" Phyllis said at last, smiling.

"So many things," he murmured,

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then as briefly as possible he told her all that had happened to him in the underworld. She listened in wondering silence.

"But—but why should you be chosen of all the people in the world?" she asked finally. "How did they know you'd arrive?"

"That I don't know; had something to do with time. Anyhow, I've things to do, and I start in tomorrow."

"Would you mind very much if I helped you?"

"Nothing I'd like better. . . ."

Their eyes met steadily, then with mute accord they moved to the girl's car.

"I shall hardly sleep tonight for thinking about all this," she said, slipping into the driving seat. "I've got something to live for at last; something interesting."

"But for you it would never have started anyway," Rod smiled. "You got the right hunch all right. Well, see you in the morning?"

"Early," she promised, then switched on the engine and engaged the first gear. Rod stood watching in silence as the car moved away through the haze of dust.

A sense of perplexity transiently settled on him. Queer how easily she seemed to fit into the whole picture. He had never known a girl with so much interest in science. Or was it more than science? She had needed plenty of nerve to follow him down into that hole. He turned back toward the hole, gathered some boarding from the outhouse and roughly covered it up. Then he went inside the farmhouse and scraped together a solitary meal. He slept badly that night.

CHAPTER III

Dr. Ashley Gore

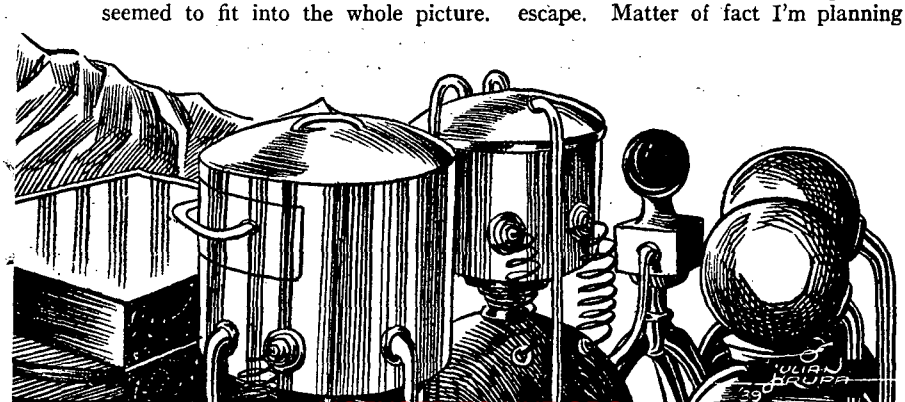
ROD had hardly finished his breakfast the following morning before Phyllis arrived, pushing the door gently open and standing silhouetted attractively against the sunshine.

"Can I come in?"

"Right in!" Rod rose to welcome her, pulled up a chair and poured out an extra cup of coffee.

"Just what," she asked slowly, "do you intend to do? You say that humanity is threatened with atavism. Suppose nobody believes you?"

Rod's jaw set doggedly. "They'll have to believe me! Scientists aren't fools. I'll show them this underground place—that ought to convince them, surely. Then I'll outline the plan of escape. Matter of fact I'm planning



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to head for New York this morning. You'd better come with me as a very material witness."

"I'll do more than that; I'll take you in the car. But say, have you decided yet on whom you ought to contact?"

"Matter of fact, no." Rod frowned. "I figured on doing that when I arrived in the city. I'm not well up on big scientists. I was going to look through 'Who's Who'."

"There's no need for that. The man you want is Doctor Ashley Gore. He's President of the Scientific Association, and as such is in a position to contact all the big scientists you're likely to need."

IT was late afternoon by the time they reached New York—nor did they find it easy to gain admission to the President of the Scientific Association. However, after considerable cajoling and stressing of urgency on Rod's part, they managed it, were shown into the great man's luxurious office.

Dr. Ashley Gore looked up from his desk with some impatience; it was close on time for him to leave. In appearance he was massive shouldered, faultlessly dressed, with the face of a prize bulldog and a startling bald head. Rather perfunctorily he waved to chairs.

"I sincerely hope you have something of real importance to discuss, Mr.—er—Marlow," he said briefly, glancing at Rod's card. "I'm a very busy man, you know."

"So am I," Rod answered tartly. "I thought you might be interested to learn that humanity is facing destruction, and that I have the means to save it."

"Another inventor, eh?" Gore smiled acidly.

"I'm not an inventor. I'm merely offering succor to those people in the world who are considered essential to progress. That's all. Disaster definitely threatens every living being any day."

"Indeed!" Gore lay back in his chair, eyes half closed.

"All you have to do is to see the place wherein you can be saved; I will direct all other operations."

"*You will* direct!" Gore echoed in amazement, sitting upright. "Your modesty astounds me, sir! What exact position do you hold, may I ask?"

Rod gestured irritably. "Does it matter? Actually, I'm a farmer, but—"

"A farmer!" Gore shot to his feet with a purpling face. "A farmer! And you have the termerity to come here and talk of matters scientific? Of death for the human race? Do you realize—"

"I realize that if you'll instruct astronomers to examine space they'll find an approaching cosmis cloud!" Rod broke in hotly. "It will be here any day. The earth may take ten years or so to go through it, and at the end of that time, whatever is left of humanity without protection, will have gone back to the caveman stage. Human beings will be atavized, fighting each other in the ruins of a one time civilization—probably in the midst of a second Glacial Epoch by the cutting off of solar warmth. . . ."

Gore's expression changed a little. He glanced at the girl, then back to Rod.

"I by no means believe your full story, young man," he said slowly, "but it does so happen that one thing is in your favor. Recent reports from astronomers, which of course pass through me, have revealed a strange haze in space blurring some of the stars. In fact several plates have been made and studied, but no man as yet has arrived at the real truth."

Rod shrugged. "Well, there you are. I've given you the truth. All I need is your further cooperation. Out at Middleton, one of the newer Middle West

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towns, is a buried city, right under my own farm. Down there are all the necessities for protecting chosen people from approaching disaster."

"That is correct, Doctor," put in Phyllis quietly. "I've seen it myself."

"The least you can do is see for yourself before you start to condemn," Rod commented.

"Hmmm. . ." Gore stroked his chins then glanced at his diary. "Sunday tomorrow—no engagements," he murmured. "I could manage it at that. I have to admit that the curious coincidence of facts has aroused my interest, even though I feel there is no real danger. If, of course, you prove all you have said, I will have every scientist in the land investigating your claim."

Rod got to his feet actively. "Now you're talking, Doctor. I'll prove everything, never fear. Suppose we say tomorrow at nine in the morning? I'll be at the Regent Hotel. We'll drive over to my place."

"I'll bring my own car," Gore responded. "I have to return to New York remember. Nine o'clock it is."

DR. GORE not only brought himself the following morning, but also three other men—lean, gray haired experts of the scientific fraternity. Their manner was vaguely interested, but professionally doubtful. Evidently Gore had sensed something worth while in Rod's observations and was prepared to take a chance.

Throughout the day the two cars continued their whirlwind journey to Middleton, with only one short break for a tabloid lunch. It was nearing seven o'clock when they regained Rod's solitary farm. He paused only long enough to provide refreshments all around, then set out into the enclosure with Phyllis at his side and the men behind him.

Eagerly he threw aside the loose boards, removed the last one with a triumphant flourish.

"There you are gentlemen—"

He broke off in dumbfounded amazement, staring blankly as though he could not credit his senses.

The hole was no longer there! The metal, yes—but it was as solid and unscratched as though never before revealed.

"WHAT the hell—?" Rod jumped down into the shallow pit and rubbed frantically at the grayness. No joint, no seam—no hole.

"Is this what you were—er—talking about?" Gore asked with awful solemnity.

Rod looked up dazedly in the doctor's cold eyes. The expressions on the other scientists' faces were grim and bitter. Only Phyllis looked sympathetic, though baffled.

"There *was* a hole!" Rod gasped hoarsely. "The entrance to the underworld. Isn't that so, Phyllis?"

"Of course!" She looked anxiously at the scientists. "That's absolutely true, gentlemen."

Gore turned suddenly. "Come, gentlemen! I think we have wasted time enough: forgive me for wasting your time on an absurd hoax. As for you two, you haven't heard the last of this—"

"But wait a minute!" Rod shouted, leaping up and clutching the scientist's arm. "I'll prove it yet. I've got an electric welder in the house. I don't know how this metal got recovered, but I can soon bore through again. Wait a minute, please."

Grudgingly, Bore agreed, watched in silence as Rod brought out the equipment and started to work with savage vigor. Minutes passed and searing flame blazed steadily at the metal.

Five minutes . . . ten minutes. The

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scientists grew restless. Their eyes were twitching from the glare. Phyllis bit her underlip uncertainly. Rod could only gaze through his goggles, unable to swallow the devasting fact that the metal was not even heated, let alone cut!

Baffled, he finally switched off, tugged off his glasses.

"I—I don't understand it," he groaned, coming to Gore's side. "Last time I cut through it in a moment, and—"

"I—I think," Gore broke in coldly," we have wasted time enough."

"But hang it, can't you see for yourself that the metal is unusual when even this flame won't go through it?"

"We did not come here to inspect peculiar metals that open and reseal without reason," Gore retorted acidly. "We came to see an underground city which could be taken as proof of your statements. As it is, there's nothing more to be said. Good evening to you, sir—and you, young lady!"

STUPEFIED, Rod watched them go, climb into their car. He only began to come to himself when the dust had settled behind them.

"Phyllis, what on earth's gone wrong?" he demanded helplessly. "Can you account for it? While we've been away in New York somebody has resealed the hole—possibly one of the robots from the city below. But *why?* And why doesn't this damned welder cut through it as it did before?"

He regarded the apparatus disgustedly. Phyllis shook her blonde head.

"I'm afraid I don't know, Rod—unless the opening was secured with a metal far tougher than the other stuff. Perhaps the presence of other people isn't wanted below. . . ."

Rod rubbed his head in bewilderment. "But why not? Why on earth should my only chance of proving myself right be stopped? Oh, I don't know! What, for instance, do I do now? I'm sunk!"

The girl considered for a moment. Finally, she said, "I thought you said that while you were down there you were taught all manner of scientific things? Several electrical and engineering secrets among others?"

"Correct. So what?"

"Use your knowledge, of course. Never mind why the hole was sealed up; we'll probably solve that mystery later. Point right now is to discover why this welder didn't work this time—or if it comes to that you might try another part of the ground. Perhaps all the metal isn't the same—may only be this resealed portion we can't cut. Try it, before we go any further."

"O.K."

In a moment or two Rod had obtained pick and shovel and dug another small hole some distance off. Confidently, he set to work again with the welder, but the answer was the same. It failed to make the least impression.

"Then all the metal's alike," the girl mused. "The only solution is to find something that *will* go through it. That's where your knowledge comes in. I'll help you if I can, but don't expect too much."

"But—"

"Now don't start protesting! Come into the house and get to work. There must be something you can devise: *use* your knowledge. It's the only way you'll find a permanent key to this underworld, or even an explanation of the mystery, for that matter."

Rod stared at her for a moment, then snapped his fingers.

"You're right!" His expression changed a little; he regarded her curiously. "Say, you're helping me a lot, aren't you?" he asked slowly. "Why do you do it? Have you some special

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interest in all this, or something?"

She shrugged. "Consider the circumstances, Rod! I happened in on this right at the beginning. It involves world issues. Can you expect any girl with the normal desire for adventure to drop out right now? Not on your life! I've got to see how you make out. Now come on. . . ."

SHE led the way into the farmhouse, switched on the light. It was already nearing twilight. Without a word she went across to the bureau and found writing pad and pencil. She pulled up a chair purposefully.

"Now—concentrate!" she ordered briefly, pointing to the chair.

The girl's steady blue eyes were strangely compelling. The oblique rays from the light threw them into curious relief—deep blue irises and large black pupils.

"Gosh, Phyllis, you're beautiful!" Rod whispered, studying her.

She gestured impatiently. "Oh, never mind that! I'm here to watch you work. Get started!"

He nodded quietly and took up the pencil. It seemed odd to him, but the moment he concentrated the transferred genius from the underworld suddenly leaped into his conscious mind. He forgot all about himself and his surroundings, was only aware of the figuring and computing he performed on that sheet of paper.

Then another sheet — and another. Hour after hour he worked on, without eyestrain, without fatigue, plunging into the midst of the most complicated mathematics, of which, before the underworld venture, he had not even had the slightest knowledge.

Beyond doubt, he was a man inspired. When at last he put his pencil down he realized he was stiff with cramp. His head ached a little, too. He glanced at his watch and gave a whistle: it was 2:30 a. m.

"Gosh!" he whispered. "Nearly six hours solid concentration . . . but I've got it! I've got it! Electrical energy of a certain wavelength will break down that metal. It will break down any matter in the universe. But how did I ever come to know that?"

He shrugged, sat staring at the mathematical solution he had worked out. He felt like a man who has composed a masterful oratorio in his sleep. Yawning, he turned, then gave a start.

Phyllis was lying on the couch, fast asleep, her traveling coat tossed over her.

Silently Rod crossed over to her, looked down at her perfect features. Uncomfortably he glanced toward the closed door. Strong ideas of conventions were still in his mind.

"Oh, hell!" he growled at last. "The world's going to change, anyway. What difference does this make?"

He drew the coat further over her, switched off the light, then tiptoed to his own room and flung himself on the bed.

CHAPTER IV

Into the City Again

ROD awoke again to the tempting odor of frying ham and eggs. He dressed hastily and strode into the kitchen to find Phyllis in the act of pouring boiling water into the coffee pot. She glanced up with a smile of welcome.

"Just beaten me to it!" she said regretfully. "Thought I'd have everything ready."

"You know," Rod muttered, sitting down, "this is all wrong. You were here all last night, and that makes me look a regular heel—"

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"Skip that and tell me what you found out," the girl interrupted briefly. "I'm not interested in what people think. Did you solve the problem?"

"Yeah, I solved it." Rod looked pensively at the ham and egg under his nose. "But in solving it I came up against something of a mystery. You see, an electrical wavelength, produced by incorporating the right amount of coils and resistances, will cut through any form of matter—not because of the heat it generates but because of the vibration, which shatters molecular clusters asunder. I could, with the necessary recoiling and electrical odds and ends, transform that welder of ours into the right instrument, and it wouldn't take me more than an hour. But why in Heaven's name did it cut through the stuff the other day and yet not yesterday? It is just as though it incorporated my special wavelength on the first occasion, but not afterward."

The girl nodded, stirring her coffee. "There may be another explanation. For instance, on the first occasion it was ordinary metal and collapsed under ordinary means. But after you had been below, the robots—probably by electrical means—toughened the molecular resistance of the metal in every direction, so that it could not be pierced again. That was why it didn't work the second time. Maybe they did it to test you, knowing that you had the knowledge to devise a means of entry if you wanted."

"Maybe you're right," Rod admitted, shrugging. "Funny how easily I solved the problem. Came just like that!" He snapped his fingers.

Rod finished his breakfast and pushed the plate away. Actively he got to his feet.

"Now there's work to be done. I want some special wire and electric stuff from Markinson's. I'm going to convert that welder of ours. Maybe I can borrow your car?"

"You can do more than that," the girl replied quietly. "I'll drive you there and, I gather, you'll need money?"

"Huh? Lord, yes! I'd forgotten."

"Leave that to me. Now let's go."

ONCE they both returned to the farm, around dinner time, Rod spent most of the afternoon pulling the welder's insides to pieces and refitting it with the gadgets he had bought. He worked with a skill that inwardly amazed him, knew every detail of what he did, had a perfect knowledge of the position of every screw and every piece of wire. By the time he had finished the whole converted interior fitted neatly into position. Smiling with satisfaction he fastened up the exterior case, then plugged in the socket.

"We're ready!" he announced, as the girl glanced inquiringly at him. "Now let's see if my reasoning's O.K."

They marched outside to the original pit and jumped down. They donned their goggles, then Rod snapped in the switch of the apparatus and directed the savagely bright beam at the metal. Instantly there was a shower of sparks: a thin, dark line began to appear in the midst of the flare.

"I was right!" he panted. "It does work! It's going through. . . ." He watched for a moment or two longer, then turned sharply to the girl. "We're going below when I've finished. Garage your car, then get my other torch from the bureau. Bring some provisions and see the farm's locked up. O. K.?"

"Check!" the girl nodded quickly, and scrambled away.

By the time she had returned with the necessities Rod was triumphantly kicking away the metal square he had burned away. It vanished, was followed by an echoing clang from below.

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He welded a metal ring beside the hole and fastened the rope lying nearby.

"Guess you'd better go first this time," he said, turning to the girl. "You know what to expect, and I'll follow right after you with the stuff. Here, take the torch. Ready?"

She nodded quickly, and he noosed the rope under her arms. Then bracing it twice round his arm he began to gently lower her into the cavity. At the limit of the rope her faint shout floated up.

"All right! Come on!"

First he lowered the provisions down to her, then slid down gently to her side. As they began to move the metropolis below came suddenly into life. Rod waved his torch beam on the floor, following a long sunken line of metal which had formerly escaped his notice.

"So that's it!" he ejaculated. "Something like traffic signals. Pass one way over it and you light the city up like switching on a pianola: go the other way and you put it out. I wonder how it happens to be under the very spot we came through?"

"Maybe dozens of them, so we just couldn't miss," the girl commented.

For a moment they stood gazing down the infinity of steps; then they slowly began to descend, neither of them speaking. From this high standpoint the city was clearly visible. It spread for perhaps two square miles under the earth—solid and impregnable, housed in its globe of metal, air conditioned by hidden connections to the surface. Again Rod found himself wondering why the metal had been made so impregnable, why he had been stopped in proving his point to the scientists.

THEY came at last to the first building; the doors had been automatically swung open. Rod recognized it immediately as the laboratory in which he had received his knowledge. The only difference this time was that there were no robots in sight. Everything was quiet.

At last Rod spoke.

"Well, what do we do?"

"Explore," the girl replied, without hesitation. "Once we have assessed this city's resources we may be able to decide what to do. Come on. . . ."

They made their tour slowly and thoroughly. Scientific achievements reared on every side, incorporating machinery of every possible use and description, most of which, Rod inwardly realized, he fully understood, thanks to the genius that had been conferred upon him.

The biggest surprise of all came when they entered an enormous domed place resembling a great mausoleum. On every hand, lying full length in six-foot-long glass cases were motionless men and women, lightly clad, hands folded on their breasts. Altogether, Rod counted one hundred and ninety nine cases; the two hundredth, at the far end of the hall was empty.

"These must be the sleepers," he observed, turning to the girl. "In a darned good state of preservation, too. Later, I suppose, I'll have to revive them."

Phyllis nodded slowly. "When you're absolutely sure of the right method—not before. You might finish them off for good, otherwise."

"Yeah. . . ." Rod's eyes wandered to the last empty case and he frowned. "Queer," he muttered, then shrugging his shoulders he led the way out of the place, returned across the main square to the laboratory.

For another hour they both wandered around, until at last Rod found a magnificently equipped radio-television instrument. With unerring skill, using

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once again his conferred knowledge, he set the complicated controls into action, started the generators. Almost immediately the screen, using absolutely perfect lifelike color, came into life. The loud speaker twanged noisily, then settled down.

"At least we're in touch with the world," he commented briefly, then he hesitated over switching off as the announcer's worried face and alarmed words arrested attention.

". . . nor have we any idea what is causing it, but it is an undoubted fact that a crime wave of unprecedented proportions seems to have been launched on America, Britain and Europe, commencing some time after noon today. Murder, rape and theft are sweeping all three countries; there are not enough detectives or police available to tackle the sin flood. Full details are not yet available. It can only be assumed that agents in each country have fixed a given hour and a given day to launch mass terror."

Rod switched off, stood in silence with lips compressed. The girl laid a hand on his arm.

"It's — it's started!" she breathed. "Must have begun just after we came below here. The first signs of atavism. In that case the cosmic cloud itself ought to be visible. Sky was clear when we came down here. . . ."

Rod slowly nodded, then struck with a sudden thought he switched on the televisor apart from the radio. His first study was of the sky. It was muddy yellow in shade, as though dense overhead fog was reigning. The sun's rays straggled weakly through it. He made observations of different parts of the world. Everywhere the color was the same.

"IT'S begun all right," he muttered; then switching back to New York's main streets he surveyed in silence the scenes of obvious disorder, the mass rioting, the altercations between police and civilians, the general first collapse of normal law and order.

"Anyway," Rod muttered, switching off, "we're safe enough down here. This place produces synthetic radiations to take the place of the lost ones. Machinery must be somewhere around here . . ." He looked round quickly. He did not stop to wonder how he knew which machine was the right one; it came to him quite naturally. Thoughtfully he switched it on, stood listening to its beating purr.

"That makes us O. K.," he said slowly, "but I still don't like the idea of men and women turning against each other as they are doing. If only I'd have been able to prove my point to Gore this place would have been a haven."

"For everybody?" the girl asked pointedly. "No, Rod—only those that are worth saving. You said that yourself."

"Yes, but how does one discriminate?" he demanded.

"I'm not sure . . . yet," the girl answered slowly. "One thing is very certain, in my opinion. The whereabouts of this place must never be discovered by the masses at large; we'd be invaded. Even though we can beat anybody off with the apparatus around us, the intruders might do irreparable damage to the machinery first."

"So long as that hole remains in the roof anybody can get in," Rod reflected. "And that gives me an idea! I'm going to find out from that damned robot exactly why this place was resealed. The thing must be around here somewhere."

He turned swiftly and headed to the opposite end of the place. After some searching he found the robot standing against a corner. At his command it

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moved forward. Sharply he questioned it, but it gave no answers, remained perfectly mute.

Baffled, Rod desisted. "You know," he said slowly to the girl, "there's something infernally queer about this. Last time this robot and two others were working of their own accord, but *this* time only my voice stirs it into action. What stimulated it on the last occasion? I don't see how it could start off on its own. It looks to me as though there's some mysterious conspiracy afoot to prevent me knowing why this place was resealed."

"Maybe, but you got in just the same," Phyllis pointed out. "The thing right now is to set to work and find out how to refill that hole with metal."

Rod nodded slowly, ideas once more turning over in his mind.

"Molecules of free air are only that way because of the spaces between them," he muttered. "Condense them, lessen the spaces, and we get a thin solid. Condense them still further and we get a strong solid. Add more molecules and atomic basis and we get—"

"The metal of which this guardian globe is composed?"

"Exactly. I'm going to work that out."

Rod moved quickly to the nearest table, pressed a switch, and an automatic calculating device shot from a concealed well. He experienced no wonder at the fact; instinctively he knew it ought to be there. He spoke steadily into the machine, gave the basis of his ideas, then waited as the mathematical interior of the thing clicked and whizzed persistently, building up a formula. In half an hour it was finished, complete to the tiniest detail.

"Wish I'd had one of these at school," he grinned, taking up the metal sheet. "Let's get busy. . . ."

He walked across to a self contained force-generating instrument, perched on three massive, wheeled legs. Seizing it, he pushed it through the doorway, aimed the sights on the far distant dim square that marked the opening to the upper world. With the girl right behind him he made quick adjustments to the multiple controls, carefully directed the highly polished, queerly designed lens.

"This thing generates force waves of infinite range, from constructive to destructive," he explained briefly. "Etherial agitation, if you like the term better. Anyway, electrical charges, following exactly the formula given here, will stream into that gap and condense the molecular paths of the air together, add other molecules into the spaces which are left. Result will finally be seamlessly joined indestructible metal — same thing we came up against. . . ."

He prepared to close the master switch—then suddenly Phyllis grabbed his arm frantically and gave a shout.

"Wait a minute! Wait, Rod! There's somebody up there, unless my eyes are playing tricks with me!"

ROD stared at the distant opening, his hands dropping to his sides. A figure was certainly in view, commencing to slide down the still dangling rope. Rod's face set grimly as he watched.

"So we're being invaded already, eh?" he demanded savagely. "O. K., I'll show him!"

He sighted the projector again, altered the frequency—then he stopped again as a shout reached him.

"Hey, there! Hey! Is that Mr. Marlow? This is Gore!"

Gore! Rod stared blankly at Phyllis, then just for a moment the funny side struck him. The sight of the pompous

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President of the Scientific Association sliding awkwardly down that rope was certainly worth seeing.

"What the devil brought him back, I wonder?" Rod whispered, waiting; and presently the scientist reached the summit of the vast steps and started to pelt down them at top speed. Breathless, dirty, and perspiring he finally came to a stop, gripped Rod's arm.

"Is this the place you were trying to tell me about?" he asked wonderingly, gazing around.

"Sure it is, but—" Rod eyed him mystifiedly. "Say, what brought you back, Doctor? I thought you and your associates had given Miss Bradman and me up as hoaxers."

"We had — at that time." Gore breathed heavily. "Then, just after dinner time today the most terrible things began to happen in the city. Most people seemed to suddenly lose their sense of reason. Things just went mad. There's some kind of cosmic cloud in the sky. I thought back on all you had said, remembered your earnestness. You see, the thing I couldn't understand was not so much why you could not find the hole you had mentioned, but why there should be metal on your land which resisted even a welding flame. That was a point well worth pondering. I decided to give you the benefit of the doubt—came here by plane intending to take another look at the metal. Since the first half of your story had come true, the rest might. Anyway, seeing the horrible things going on in the city I saw no harm in trying. I found the farm locked up; then going to the hole I saw the rope, this lighted city, and— Well, here I am."

"And only just in time," Rod said slowly. "I was just on the point of sealing the hole."

"Evidently," the girl said slowly, "you are a man of intelligence, Doctor. You reasoned things out for yourself—came right back here to correct your mistakes. I guess that took plenty of pride swallowing in a man of your position. But it'll pay you; you'll be safe enough down here with us."

"But that wasn't my main reason for coming," Gore went on anxiously. "Things are getting worse every hour, Mr. Marlow. Surely, amongst all this machinery there must be some way to counteract the atavism which has set in? Save humanity? That's what you set out to do, isn't it? What you were chosen for?"

"Not entirely, Doctor. I was chosen to save the *deserving* of humanity—men and women with intelligence and reason like yours. There is not, so far as I can find, any method here of saving the surface. The cosmic cloud cannot be dispelled by any means we've got. All that can be done is to collect down here all those who are worth saving. Only thing is, I'm not quite sure how to discriminate."

"I am," Phyllis put in, slowly. "Doctor Gore has provided the answer. He knows all the scientific and intellectual heads of every country. Every scientist and every master brain. That right?"

"Most of them," Gore acknowledged. "Why?"

"Your task will be to gather them together in the shortest possible time, bring them here. It doesn't matter how you get them, what methods you use, so long as you succeed. Until you return and bring those whom you think worth having with you, we'll keep the opening in the roof unsealed. How's that?"

"Perfect!" declared Rod with enthusiasm. "Matter of fact, that was the idea I had in mind myself. Can you do that, Doc?"

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"Without delay," Gore nodded promptly. "Everything now depends on time. You can rely on me. I'll get back to New York right away. The plane's waiting for me."

"And as you go up the steps," Rod added, "take care to step over that metal bar at the summit. It's a switch."

Gore nodded, turned actively away. In a moment or two he was mounting the steps.

ROD turned slowly to the girl.

"Well, that about settles that. Nothing to do now but wait."

"I don't agree with you there, Rod. As I see it, in about ten years the cosmic cloud will have passed and a civilization will remain—buildings, that is. But *will* it remain? On the last occasion not one brick was left standing on another because of the barbaric destructiveness of atavized humans. Definitely, in this case too, the atavizing people will drift to war and bestial savagery as they sink lower down the scale. Cities will suffer. A world well supplied with arts and treasures will be wantonly destroyed. That isn't right, particularly when down here there will be expert minds who can take everything over when the cloud passes . . ."

"Well?" Rod looked at the girl curiously.

"You've got to devise a means of destroying all those people who try to invade or pillage cities," she went on grimly. "It's the only just thing to do. And the only way to do it is to use this force projector on still another wavelength and on a larger scale. Devise a wavelength of destructive power which will pass through solid matter—such as intervening rock, but will disrupt and destroy flesh and blood the instant it strikes it. . . . It can be done."

"And watch world events through the televisor meantime?"

"Yes. Seems the best course to me."

"O. K., I'll get busy—but I'm certainly not going to use such a terrific weapon from underground unless the wanton destruction of surface cities really warrants it. Sounds rather too ruthless to me."

The girl's eyebrows rose. "Ruthless? Is that what you think of me?"

"Not of you; only of your plan. You must admit it's drastic."

She remained silent, but Rod fancied he detected a curious hardness in her clear blue eyes. In silence he seized the force projector and wheeled it back into the laboratory, settled down to analyze it and work out a wavelength capable of piercing unlimited hard matter yet shattering human structure the moment it was contacted.

As he worked, with the adding machine to aid him, he was aware that Phyllis was watching him in silence. For the first time since he had met her his vague doubts were beginning to crystallize. He had always known the girl was somehow mysterious. Now he was beginning to think she was hard and callous—the last thing he wanted to believe. But there was no gainsaying the fact that since she had come to this underworld all the girlishness had dropped from her. Her whole manner was subtly altering.

CHAPTER V

A Degenerating World

TWO days passed in the underworld. They were days in which Rod spent nearly all his time working out the final details of a giant force projector, and afterward supervising its rapid erection in a comparatively deserted machine room near the laboratory. Engineering science and tireless robots made short work of a job that would

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have otherwise been incredibly complicated.

While he was thus engaged the girl spent the time exploring, discovered the synthetic food department and set robots to work on such domestic matters as cooking and attendance. By degrees she unearthed the different places where comfort abounded—long airy lounges, softly lit, immensely roomy sleeping rooms; beds and bedding in perfect repair. There were all clothing requisites, unlimited water and food, automatically controlled air. . . . The place was a super efficiency of preparation, perfectly prepared for an indefinite siege.

It struck Rod that the girl was curiously subdued, and he inwardly blamed himself as the cause. He'd probably gotten her intentions all wrong, anyway.

She spent a lot of time at the radio televisor, intently watching scenes of vast disorder and senseless struggle, listened to the fevered yammerings of radio announcers declaring that war was eminent. Every nation was preparing to fling itself against its neighbor. The whole mad, insane world was drifting under the yellow skies to wholesale slaughter and destruction. Man was falling down the evolutionary ladder with incredible speed.

"It's easy to see," Rod commented slowly, as he joined the girl one afternoon, "how the early civilizations fell. Maybe, even, man's discontent through the ages has been an hereditary relic of that last devolution. At heart he is not all bad—nobody is. What is it makes people bad? Maybe that heritage."

"Maybe," Phyllis admitted quietly. "I never thought of it like that before. Whatever it may be, though, the wanton destruction which eradicated early cities from the world must not be repeated. We must stop it, from here—"

She broke off and the question Rod was about to ask was forgotten as they both turned at a sudden sound. A figure came slowly through the doorway, disheveled and weary. It was Doctor Gore. Behind him were evidences of other men and women, all of them worse for wear, expressions crossed between relief and amazement at the vision of the amazing underworld.

"You made it!" Rod cried delightedly and the scientist nodded exhaustedly.

"Yes. The hardest job I ever had—any of us ever had for that matter. Some have come by fast plane, others by road, others walked, but they all arrived. . . ." He turned, waved his arm to the people. "Ladies and gentlemen, meet Mr. Rodney Marlow and Miss Bradman. They will tell you the rest of the story." Looking at the two again, he added, "There are about two hundred of us altogether—the picked brains of America, England and Europe, in science, politics, engineering, geology, welfare, etcetera. . . ."

"O. K.," Rod interrupted briefly. "You'll be well cared for. Phyllis, see that they get a meal, then make accommodation arrangements. I'm going to seal that hole up before any unwanted ones start drifting down."

The girl nodded and turned away at the head of the weary people. Rod wasted no time sealing the gap. When at last the empty space was closed, with solid, immovable metal he breathed more freely, turned and headed back with the projector to the laboratory. To his surprise, Phyllis was there, seated before the radio. She switched it off and got to her feet as he came in.

"World war has commenced," she announced steadily.

Rod shrugged. "I expected it— But say, what are you doing here? What about the people?"

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"They're O. K.—having a meal and a rest. The robots will take care of them. We've still got work to do, Rod. Your force projector's finished, isn't it? Ready for action?"

"Sure, but we've got to wait until we see a deliberate attack on a city before we—"

"We shan't wait for that," the girl answered coldly. "Every human being on the surface has got to be destroyed! The Earth, when it clears the cosmic cloud, will start again with a clean sheet, freed forever from the degenerate rabble which has tenanted it too long already."

ROD stared. "Good Heavens, Phyllis, do you realize what you are saying? It's world massacre!"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" Her voice was incredibly hard and commanding. "All the people that are worth while are down here, that's been seen to. Those who are left above are nothing better than animals, fast on the way to destruction. They'll kill each other in the end, anyway, but they'll destroy every useful city and its contents in the doing. I, for one, don't intend to allow that to happen. Destroy them! They're nothing but vermin. No brains, no sense, concerned only with their own petty lusts and villainies. . . . If you don't do it, I will!"

"You!" Rod laughed shortly. "You don't even know how!"

The girl hesitated a moment, then flashed him a look of biting contempt. Calmly she strode from the laboratory and closed the door. In an instant Rod was after her, caught up to her as she entered the projector room. The giant instrument was standing motionless, ready for instant action. Without so much as a glance to either side Phyllis moved to it, operated the switchboard which Rod had thought was his own especial knowledge, slammed in the switches that started the generators.

Rod saw nothing unusual, but from the graded scale with its quivering needles, from the slow turning of the giant apparatus on its universal bearings, he knew quite well that the girl was controlling the instrument through a slow arc, hurling forth destructive waves clean through the earth, destroying every living thing in the track that reposed on the surface.

Suddenly life surged back into him. He hurled himself forward toward the girl, intent on seizing her and stopping her wholesale destruction of living beings.

"Stand exactly where you are!" she commanded, and to his utter bewilderment a silvered object gleamed suddenly in her hand, whipped with terrific speed from the filmy dress she was still wearing. But this was not the pleasing, generous Phyllis Bradman he had grown to love: it was a cold, calculating woman with a mission to fulfill.

"Make one move toward me until this task is finished and I'll be forced to destroy you, Rod," she said slowly. "I beg of you not to make me do it. This weapon is a tiny duplicate of this object here. No flesh and blood can withstand its blast."

"But, Phyllis, what—? How—?" Rod stopped, too utterly amazed to speak further.

The girl flashed a glance at the meters, at the still slowly turning instrument. Her lips twisted into a grim smile.

"Ask yourself," she said quietly, "just what good are those left on the surface? What have they ever done? How can a single one of them survive the effects of ever growing atavism? They'll die, horribly. Maybe spend months in lingering agony from

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wounds. War—of the vilest kind—will ride the earth and destroy all that has ever been built up, unless those who cause that war are destroyed first! It will be a quicker death for them—a merciful death, for in the end they are bound to meet up with it. The intellectuals, the brains of the world, remain. Down here! The rest will go, leave the earth to be taken over again unscratched. And out of it may grow a better, worthier civilization."

VAGUELY Rod began to see the point of her reasoning. He eyed her steadily.

"In an hour this projector will have encompassed every part of the globe," she went on quietly, turning away from it. "Since the force beam expands fanwise as it travels, it incorporates an enormous surface area at remoter regions of the world. I have it all reasoned out. Sixty minutes to eliminate a scum that should never have been on the earth anyway—which *would* never have been had birth been controlled and only intelligence been the permit to life . . ."

"*You* have it all reasoned out!" Rod whispered. "*You* have! I thought that was my task. I was chosen to save those that deserved to be saved . . ."

"At my direction, yes," Phyllis acknowledged quietly.

"What!"

"You've known me as Phyllis Bradman," she went on steadily, moving toward him and putting her weapon slowly away. "That is not my name. Actually, my position is that of a queen, though I am not designated as such. I am the complete ruler of this underworld. My name is Erina . . ."

"I always suspected there was something queer about you," Rod muttered. "But—but what does it all mean? What are you driving at?"

"I occupied the two hundredth coffin," she announced calmly. "Let me tell you the whole story. . . . I am the daughter of Saldon Ruj, the former ruler of this underworld—in fact of the whole world before the last atavism set in. When that atavism set in, many enemies were present with us down here. My father was slain. Events so worked out that our only chance of escape from them lay in feigning death by suspended animation, the period of the drug timed to last until mankind should be well on the upward trail again.

"Our enemies presumably slew each other, since no trace of them remained upon my awakening. Because of my position and authority the particular dose I had taken was timed to operate a year ahead of everybody else, so that I could determine in that time what course to take when the others recovered.

"I decided to see the world. I realized from our charts that the next atavism could not be more than a few days away. . . .

"I departed to the surface and took on an apparently ordinary identity. First thing I found was that geological slips had brought out metal underworld remarkably near the surface soil at one spot. Though the metal could not be broken without special knowledge, it was to me, rather disconcerting. The first thing I saw was you investigating the metal. I have to admit, Rod, that you attracted me immensely."

"Can a woman so clever, so resourceful, be attracted by a mere farmer?" Rod asked bitterly.

"Even a ruler, even a woman who has slept as long as I have, can still love," she answered steadily. "I was only twenty-two when I went to sleep; physically I am hardly any older even now. I saw the moment I met you that

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you were no fool, and since part of my scheme included obtaining all the intellectual people I could find, I led you on. Your language was easy; your mind told me everything. . . . "

"Then my discovering the city, all that robot talk, was so much bunk? Even that about me being the savior of mankind?"

"Most of it was true, though I was back of you all the time. The robots, of course, acted and spoke in response to my commands. I personally supervised everything the first time you were down here. It was easy enough, even easier when you accidentally fell and hurt yourself. That gave me time to act."

"BUT how did you get down? You met me coming back up the steps!"

"That links up with something else." The girl smiled mysteriously. "I'll tell you that later. As you may have guessed, the welder you used on the first occasion was one equipped exactly like the one you used for the final entrance. I arranged that. You found the secret because I hypnotized you into finding it. You were by no means a difficult subject."

"All those outporings of genius from that machine? Were they real?"

"In every way. I gave you knowledge of amazing range, all of which is going to be useful to you in building up the new civilization when we take over."

Rod frowned. "Now I understand why conventions didn't worry you. Why you had infinite money. Naturally, you manufactured the stuff?"

She nodded slowly, smiling.

"But, Phyllis, it still leaves parts undone. How on earth did you ever reseal that hole when we were away in New York?"

"That was easy enough. I transferred myself from New York to this underworld, performed the act, then returned to New York."

"What! All in one night! Whose plane did you use?"

"I didn't use a plane. Do you remember asking me once if I had disappeared while leaving you down the lane?"

"Sure I do. I've never forgotten it."

"It's a gift, Rod, handed on to me by my father as he died. Even as ordinary rulers hand down certain valuable secrets to their next of kin, so my father handed on to me a supreme scientific achievement of his own discovery—mental control of matter. Mind over matter, if you wish, by which the body is compelled to obey the mind.

"If you remember, the early civilizations used it quite a lot; the Bible records it. If I will myself to a certain place, I am there, just as certain experts in your modern world cause an astral projection to take place. I use my whole body, however. I only behaved normally where necessity compelled it, but where there was no sense in physically wearing myself out, I merely willed myself to a point I was heading for.

"That was how I left this underworld in the first place, how I got to New York and back, how I met you so suddenly, how I disappeared in the lane. I thought, in the lane, that I was out of view, otherwise I would have been more careful."

"And why did you reseal the hole and make me look such a fool?"

"For a very good reason. When I returned to reseal it I also converted your welder back into a normal one. I wanted only the *intelligent* men, able to think for themselves. Purposely I made you contact Dr. Gore. I knew that if he found no trace of proof for your statements he'd probably go off in

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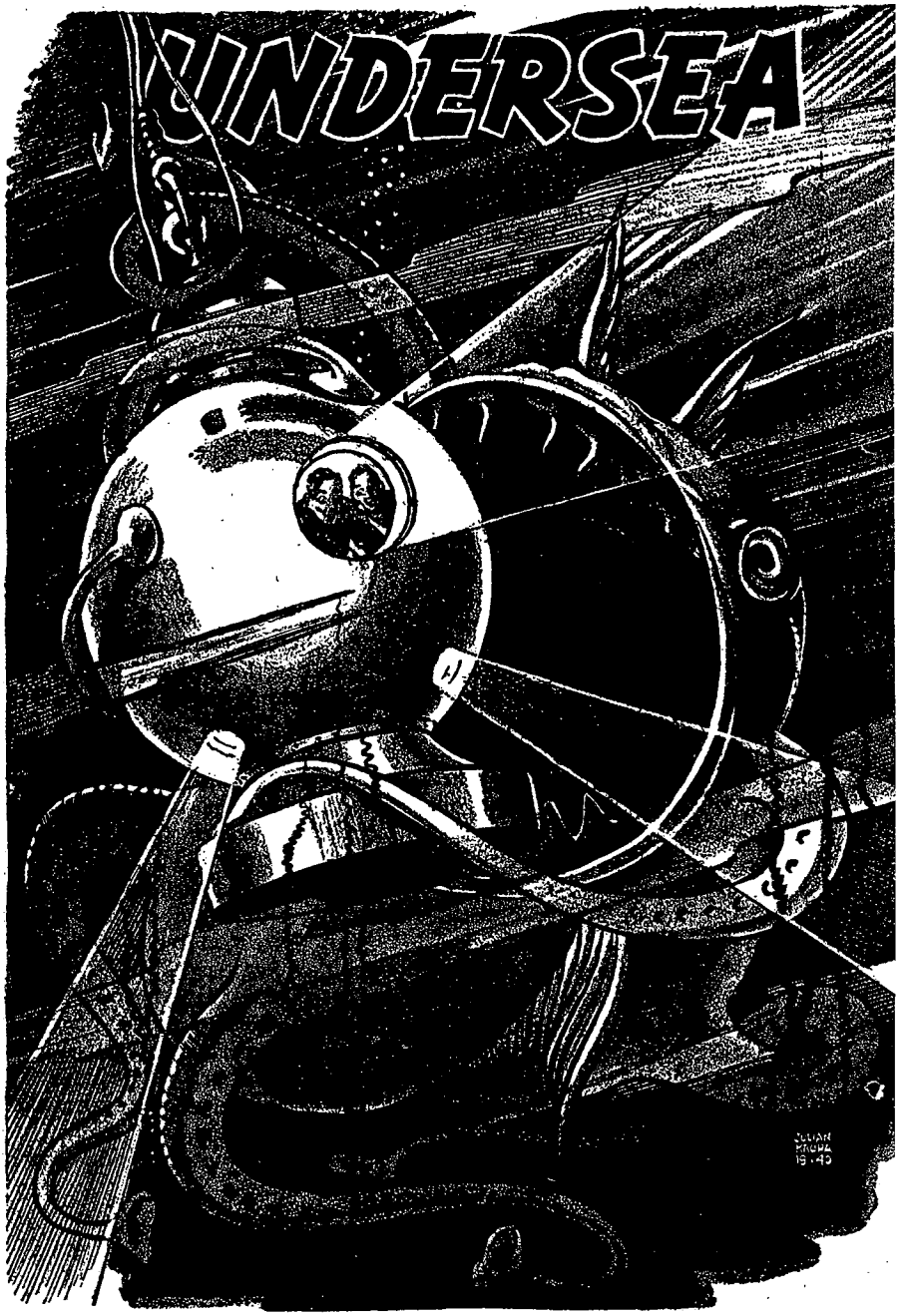

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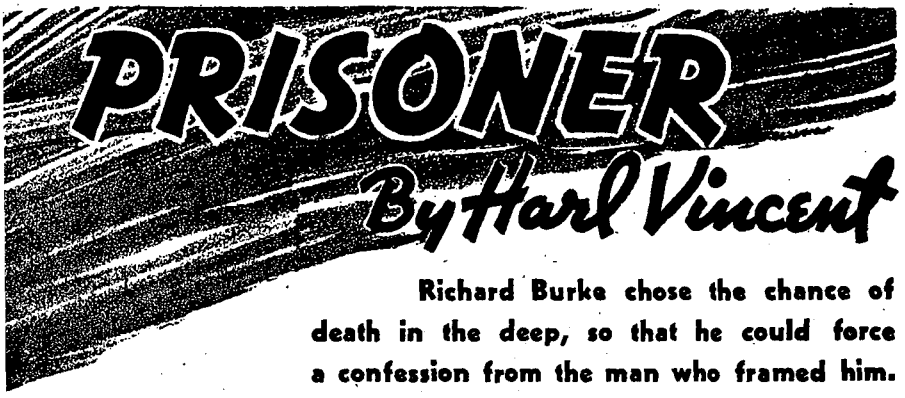

Richard Burke chose the chance of death in the deep, so that he could force a confession from the man who framed him.

"RICHARD BURKE, I sentence you to confinement in Attica Prison for a period of not less than ten nor more than twenty years. . . ."

It would have been longer if he'd been a second offender or if they could have shown a motive for the killing of which he was accused. They couldn't show that. Kill Jack Van den Broek, the best friend he'd ever had? Impossible. But the jury had thought otherwise. There was circumstantial evidence that looked perfect. Alibis that seemingly broke down. And Burke was morally certain, knowing that the evidence had been planted, that Francis Augustine had somehow been at the bottom of his framing. The great Professor Augustine, for whom Dick had long worked, who had so many times . . . well, he just had the hunch, put it that way.

For which reason, he had engineered his plans through Slim Curran. And now he was waiting for the reply to his application.

Burke had a good friend in Slim Curran, one of the Sheriff's finer deputies. Slim had pulled some wires on the outside in Burke's behalf, otherwise, he'd have long since been on his way to Attica and already starting his ten to twenty bit.

Waiting in growing animosity toward Augustine, and in a state of nerves that was rapidly coming to the snapping point. Suppose the Court refused his application!

Burke wasn't the first, nor would he be the last man to suffer for the crime of another. He couldn't prove his innocence. He had but one hope now. In these days, where evidence was purely circumstantial, there were the chances for alternative sentences. In the interest of science, or rather in the interest of the scientists who were coming to be such a factor in all branches of government and jurisprudence. And one such possible alternative would give Burke his chance to get close to Augustine, might even enable him to go further. . . .

This was the Augustine Undersea Balloon, which was to descend six miles in the ocean in a couple of weeks. And in which would descend as observers two convicts who, thereby, would satisfy their sentences in full. None of Augustine's devices had returned from depths greater than two miles. But Burke was not concerned with that; he only wanted to get near to the man he

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was sure had framed him. And Augustine couldn't prevent that, once his application was approved.

Whether or not he ever came up from the depths made no difference. To rot in the Big House would be worse. He knew Augustine, knew his influence, and felt certain that the man would see to it that he served his full time once he was sent away. By the same token, he knew that the professor, once he learned to his chagrin who was going down in his machine—if Burke could make the grade—would find some means of making sure he never came back alive. Augustine was full of dirty tricks. In the meantime, though, Burke would have a chance at him himself, some sort of chance. . . .

Days passed. He had about given up hope when there was a shout from the main gate of the gallery: "Burke—going out! Get everything together. Going out!"

Going out? Burke was going *down*. His pulses raced with the excitement of the thought.

HE had never thought much of these undersea contrivances of Augustine's. They were developments of the free balloon first proposed some seventy years previously by the more famous professor, Auguste Piccard. Strange, the slight similarity in names. The things had been an expensive hobby with Augustine; several had been built and tested. Two had never returned from the mysterious deep. The one which had at last come up to bob alongside the mother ship brought with it two madmen, two utterly crazed young scientists who were never able to discuss their adventure. Only their films were of value and even these recorded nothing beyond the two mile depth.

Augustine, unlike the originator of the underwater free balloon and one of the first to make stratosphere balloon flights, had never had the courage to go down in one of his own contraptions. The new Alternative Sentence Law was a help to him.

Burke's companion-to-be was Thaddeus Zybyski, a former radio man who had done three years of a life sentence in Sing Sing. Through some underworld connections he had somehow managed this alternative. He was a confessed kidnaper. Of a five year old baby, who had died on his hands! Burke was forced to occupy the same cell with the man on the ship that was to take them to the scene of the descent. The kidnaper, a surly and murderous-looking brute, insisted on being called Teddy. And Teddy was getting cold feet.

"I'm damn near tempted to back out," he told Burke on their second day out. "Hell, it's an easy life in the radio room up the river. So what the hell? The boys may make a break one of these days. And the hacks aren't so bad anyway. This way it's curtains sure. We'll never come up in that thing."

Which gave Burke an idea. He eyed the big man contemplatively. Teddy was about Augustine's build, same bulky frame, same paunchy jowls. If it weren't for the prison pallor, his lockstep gait and the absence of the square black mustache, he could easily pass for the scheming professor.

"Maybe we can rig up that break right here," he suggested to Teddy.

"A getaway! From here? You're nuts. What do you think the two hacks came along from Sing Sing for? To see damn well I get in that machine and am properly sunk. Same as the two screws that came with you. Hell, they aren't giving us any breaks."

"I still think you might make it," Burke insisted. "Not me. I'm in this

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to stay. But you can get away with it."

"How?" The con was impressed.

Burke started outlining his plot.

AT length there came the time when the whine of the atomic motors slowed and finally stopped. The ship was rolling and pitching without headway in deep water. "Too damn deep for me," growled Teddy. He and Burke were herded up on deck by the four guards. The professor greeted them unctuously, rubbing his pudgy hands together and showing tobacco-stained teeth beneath his square mustache. He wore sun goggles, which was a break Burke hadn't anticipated.

"Well, my hearties," he offered. "Ready for the plunge?"

"Sure we're ready," rasped Teddy. "How else could we be?"

Burke made no comment.

The car, suspended a few feet above the deck from the boom of a derrick, seemed huge viewed from nearby. It was a gleaming sphere of eighteen feet diameter, with three heavy conical ballast weights on its underside and with six broad vertical fins spaced around its circumference to keep its inner floor level when in the water. The ballast cones, Burke knew, could be unlatched from inside when it was desired to return to the surface. Provided the latches hadn't been tampered with. . . .

From sturdy steel eyes on the top of the sphere, a dozen steel cables draped over the ship's rail and looped down to the wire net that enclosed the balloon.*

Augustine turned to the guards. "It's all right, boys," he assured them, patting his hip. "I want to take them inside. There's only room for three inside. But I'm armed."

Burke saw from the corner of his eye that the professor's amphibian plane was on the after deck of the ship. Even as he looked, the pilot started warming up the motors. Just as he'd guessed and told Zybyski. Augustine was flying for home as soon as the sphere was in water.

The three men were inside the gondola then and the professor started explaining its many apparatuses. The inner chamber was twelve feet in diameter, its three foot thickness of triple berylumin wall sufficient to withstand an external pressure of twenty thousand pounds per square inch.*

In a half hour the watchers on the ship's deck saw Augustine climb through the manhole of the car and emerge. He looked over the side and saw that the huge oil bag was filled. The hose couplings had been disconnected and the bag nipples capped. Chuckling, he swung home the heavy plug to close the manhole and told the mechanics to make it fast. Then he turned to the grinning guards.

"They're safe there as they would be anywhere," he said. "And I guess you fellows aren't sorry. Your work is done; you only have to wait for the cutter that is to take you back. When they return to the surface they're free according to law. And I wish them luck, for my sake as well as their own."

This last seemed sincere, spoken huskily. None of those who heard could doubt the professor's real feelings. He was a man of science, the listeners were convinced, who had a heart. Anxious to see his experiments succeed, anxious to give the world any new dis-

* This balloon itself is an envelope of oil-and-water-tight metallic fabric filled with oil. Oil, being lighter than water, buoys up the heavy gondola in water as helium or hydrogen lifts the car of a balloon in air. Only in this case the ballast is of sufficient weight to draw the balloon gradually to the bottom of the ocean.—Author.

* This is equivalent to more than forty-six thousand feet of sea water and so the car is safe at depths fifty percent greater than any likely to be encountered in either Atlantic or Pacific.—Author.

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coveries that might result. At the same time, ready to cooperate with and serve the ends of justice under the new laws. Why, he was positively pale with emotion!

As the great three-legged and six-finned sphere was lowered over the side, the professor stood with arms folded, his face hidden from the rest. Obviously, he was deeply moved as the waters closed over his brain child. And when the great oil-filled balloon began to sink and the cable from the derrick was let loose from the gondola below, he turned and hurried toward the amphibian.

"So long," he called back. "I'll keep in . . ."

Just then the deck televis shrieked: "Grab him! That's not Augustine! It's Zybyski. Take off his goggles and mustache."

The guards closed in swiftly and surely.

CHAPTER II

Monster of the Deep

THE real Francis Augustine did not recover consciousness until the outside pressure gauge registered more than eleven hundred pounds. They were nearly a half mile beneath the surface. Trussed and gagged as he was, the professor could only struggle madly and make horrible grunting noises as his eyes seemed about to fall from their sockets.

Ungently, Burke ripped the gag from his mouth.

"G-god!" babbled Augustine, looking wildly at the gauges. "We're down. We've submerged."

Burke was untying the professor's feet. "You're telling me!" he said savagely. "And how do you like it?"

"But, Dick!" Augustine's stare was frenzied and perspiration oozed out in great beads on his forehead as he struggled to a sitting position. "You don't understand. You—"

"Damn right I understand. You fixed things so I'd stay sunk and now you're in the same boat. Don't think so much of it, do you?"

"But I didn't mean—"

"No, you didn't mean to come along. But here you are. It was all right for me, wasn't it? When it's you it's different. Now, see if you can figure a way out—for both of us."

Augustine's flabby jowls twitched violently; his pendulous lower lip quivered. "Un-untie my hands, Dick," he begged.

Burke obliged, first patting his own hip pocket, to which the professor's capsule projector had been transferred. "Don't try anything funny," he warned. "I've your gun. Not that I'd need it."

The older man was almost as white now as had been Zybyski when he stepped outside the sphere. With his hands finally free, he at once buried his face in them. His big frame shook convulsively. He was in a mortal funk.

"Snap out of it!" snarled Burke. "Get your think tank working. What'd you do to this thing to wreck it so it couldn't rise?"

The professor looked up with an agony of craven fear in his every expression. He was suddenly an old, old man. "I—I welded the ballast weights to the shell," he admitted.

"That's nice. *Lovely*. All beautifully taken care of on the outside where we can't get at them. Where the pressure'd flatten us like chewing gum even if we could get out there. You're good, you are."

Augustine slumped to his knees, started alternately praying and cursing. Incoherently. Burke slapped him back to blubbering sanity.

"Get yourself together and face the

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facts. If we have to die, let's die sane anyway. And if there's any chance at all, let's try and dope it out."

"There's no chance in the world," sobbed the professor.

Burke drew back his arm for another swing. "Don't, don't!" the demoralized man pleaded. "I'll be good."

He was like a child. The young research engineer regarded him contemptuously, turned his back and moved to the televis. "This is no good down this far, is it?" he asked.

"No—not below a thousand feet."

Burke looked at the pressure gauge. Two thousand pounds, it read. "We're not sinking very fast," he said.

"No, the difference in weight of the car in excess of the buoyancy of the balloon is very little. The descent must be gradual for safety."

"Safety—hmpf. Call this safety?"

"I mean under ordinary circumstances." Augustine was coming around to normal.

"Then we wouldn't need to discard much weight to halt our downward progress, would we?"

"A couple of hundred pounds would do it now. But there is no way of throwing off any weight at all. The manhole can't be opened from inside; even if it could be the pressure would swamp us. No hope!"

"How long will our air last? Food and water?"

"Four days with two aboard."

Burke's eyes narrowed, then he laughed. "Hell's bells," he chuckled. "No need of killing you or of you killing me to make it last eight days, is there? That would only prolong the agony for the one that was left alive. Might just as well wait for what's coming to us."

He stared at the professor. Augustine stared back. The spectre of certain death was between them.

THREE thousand pounds, nearly seven thousand feet, they were down before either of them thought of switching on the outside lights to see what there was to see of the fabled denizens of the deep. Until now no man still alive and sane had seen more than vague shadows on a color screen. That is, at any depth such as this.

"You can finish telling me about the gadgets now," said Burke. "How do you turn on the outer floods?"

Augustine showed him, first illuminating the huge balloon that swayed above them, then the sides, then below. There were five of the thick glass ports, one above, one below, and three spaced around the middle. They saw absolutely nothing outside the circles of misty brilliance and nothing within the zones of illumination excepting a few wriggling, corkscrewlike glistening threads that slithered upward over the circular ports. They were utterly alone in the depths.

"Showing you about the gadgets, as you call them, reminds me," said the professor. "How did you and the other manage this? Where's he? All I recall is when the mountain fell on my head."

Burke laughed in spite of the seriousness of the situation. His companion was taking it better than he'd expected —so far. "That was Teddy," he told him. "He slugged you from behind. You didn't make a sound to warn those outside. Then he took your sun glasses and stuck on the false mustache we'd made from his own hair in imitation of your real one. We stripped you and he changed to your clothing. Then he went outside and bossed the job of closing us up and dropping us over."

Augustine nodded. "Yes, that way, he could easily pass for me." Dropping his eyes to the unfamiliar clothing he'd not even noticed yet, the professor

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snapped: "But you—you aided a criminal to escape. He would get away in my plane and not be suspected!"

"That's what you think. And that's what Teddy thought. I kidded him along so I could get you right here where you are. I won—he lost. Once we were down I used the televis—quick. Zybyski will say it was a double cross. I call it justice—turning him in again. Think I'd let a rat like that loose? He'd be murdering someone else's baby in a year or so. Oh, no."

Augustine looked thoughtful. "You did a pretty good job at that," he admitted. "And I guess I deserve what I'm getting, too."

Burke was amazed; his companion was as cool now as a cucumber. Was he cooking up something in his treacherously inventive mind?

"You certainly do deserve it. But isn't there something we can do? No possible chance at all?"

The professor shook his head dolefully. Then his eyes widened suddenly and he pointed to one of the viewing ports. "Look!" he yelped. "What on earth is that?"

They had switched off the outer floodlights to save the batteries as much as possible, though why they needed to save them was not clear. "Looks like a submarine," exclaimed Burke.

It did. Something was approaching steadily in the inky blackness out there, something with a long row of small lights along its side and with a twin beam exploring ahead. Burke switched on their side floods and the creature was revealed, not as any man-made duplication of Captain Nemo's *Nautilus*, but as a gigantic living, swimming monster that carried its own lights. One look at its enormous bulk, its ten foot long razor fins, its huge head and broad, tusk-filled mouth was enough for Burke. He switched off the lights both inside and outside the sphere. The creature was five hundred feet long if an inch.

"Holy Smoke!" he gasped. "That thing could swallow us whole. And if it should get tangled up in the cables above or puncture the balloon, it'll be just too bad. Hope he didn't see us."

Augustine moaned a little in the darkness. "As well go that way as the other," he whispered.

It was true. Burke felt a little foolish over his useless precautions. But he didn't turn on the inside lights until they'd seen the monster that was like a lighted ocean liner in the blackness drift on up past the bulking shadow of the balloon and out of sight.

FIFTY-FIVE hundred pounds. About two and a half miles of ocean lay above them. A distinct sense of movement was felt suddenly; the pointer of the gauge swung rapidly across the scale to sixty-two hundred, then remained stationary.

"What the hell," said Burke. "Did we fall?"

Augustine looked at another of the gauges. "We were swept downward by a submarine current. And we're still in it, but it has leveled off and is carrying us rapidly toward the northeast. Sa-ay!"

The professor's eyes brightened on the exclamation.

"Say what?" Burke couldn't see anything to be jubilant over.

"There is a chance, just one remote chance," said Augustine, "that we may be swept into a rising current. Sort of an updraft, you know. We're heading for the Irish coast now. Where we started, the depth was more than five miles. It'll be getting shallower after a while. And if there is such an upward current and we strike it . . ."

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"What are the probabilities?" asked the younger man dubiously.

Augustine's face fell. "About ten million to one," he admitted.

"That's what I thought."

They had started dropping again at about the former rate; the current had been unable to hold them. It was like drifting in the car of an ancient gas-filled balloon, at the mercy of every errant wind, falling for lack of ballast to throw out. They could discharge oil from the bag above, of course, the same as you could use the ripcord of a gas balloon. But that would hasten the end, not prolong it.

"Let's light up outside," said Burke for want of action. And he switched on the floods as he spoke. He hadn't the heart to go to work on Augustine right now. He'd suffer enough—later.

A mountain peak loomed immediately alongside, vanished into the blackness above. They were slithering down the sheer face of a granite cliff, the great balloon overhead bouncing over its jutting ledges. Fortunately, their descent was very gradual.

And then the balloon had lodged between two projecting fingers of rock. They jerked to a stop. The car dangled, swaying before the mouth of a huge cavern. The pressure was seventy-one hundred.

Burke's eyes tried to penetrate the gloom beyond the white wall of light that pushed perhaps a hundred feet into the cavern. He had thought he saw something flicker back there. He had! Four discs of luminosity swam into view, like the eyes of a team of dogs gleaming in an automobile headlight glare. But these four ghastly orbs grew steadily larger.

And then an ugly, squirmy monster hove into view. This was a giant squid, an octopus thing with four eyes that reared its hideous body forty feet from the cavern floor on three of its sucker-lined arms while the other five arms weaved and twined toward the dangling sphere. Two eyes were beneath, two above a cavernous, wide-open mouth that was lined with row upon row of glistening incisors. A tentative arm reached out as the terrifying creature advanced, its tip curling around a few of the cables that connected their car with the balloon. The car swung crazily in toward that yawning mouth, spilling the two men in a heap on the floor.

"God!" screamed Augustine. "It's going to swallow us."

The car jerked as cables snapped. And then the great jaws closed in over them. There was the crunch of huge teeth on the berylumin shell. But the creature, powerful as it was, could make no impression on that glass-hard surface. The car rolled inside and the teeth snapped shut on what was left of the frayed cables.

There were convulsive heavings of the sphere and it rolled over and over in the huge cavity of a mouth, battering its two occupants against bunks, instrument tables and walls. A few dizzying flashes came to them in the tumbling, of great reddish-purple splotches and dangling fleshy members, of a constricted opening down which their sphere spun madly.

The monster was swallowing them whole!

CHAPTER III

Monster with a Stomachache

FINALLY the car lurched to rest with its floor cocked at an angle. Not so bad, though; at least they could stand. They took stock of their bruises and of the bizarre surroundings. "Hell of a note," grumbled Burke.

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Out through a port he saw only the swirling green stickiness of the digestive juices of their captor's interior. "Ugh!"

Augustine was blubbering again. "Dick," he whined. "Before I die, I must confess. I was the one who killed Van den Broek. I set the police on you. I planted the evidence. Forgive me, Dick."

Forgive? Burke forgot their plight, forgot everything but blind rage. This man would've let him rot in the pen. He'd have sent him to the hot seat if he could. And now this! But rage was futile now.

"Hell of a time to confess!" snarled Burke. "You make me think of the guy who paid his pal fifty bucks he'd owed him for ten years—just when the boat they were on was torpedoed. Sinking. Shut up your bellering and tell me where's the gadget you charge the shell with."

"What gadget?"

"You built a weapon into these things to ward off undersea monsters. What good is it? How does it work?"

The demoralized professor shakily indicated a small control panel. Burke examined it, then yanked the rheostat all the way over. The result was instant and nearly catastrophic. A blinding flash outshone their floods in the green murk outside. The car heaved wildly, smashed him to the floor. Then he came up against the wall under a table.

There were violent upheavals and shudderings.

"The thing's trying to vomit us out," moaned the professor. "And we're stuck in its throat."

Burke could see that this was so. A port faced directly out toward the creature's mouth. The mouth was stretched wide. Through its gaping maw the engineer could see reflected in the glare of their flood lights the rocky rim of the cavern entrance. And the frayed cable ends dangling from above. Then, with a wild lunge, the monster flung out of its lair into the black abyss of the sea.

Clinging to the bolted-down legs of the table, Burke managed to get to his feet. He switched off the floods and saw that the green murk remained alight. With lambent flame that told of intense heat generated by this weapon that had been loosed within the beast. There were momentary flashes of emptiness where the thick green fluid would clear away only to be replaced by rolling whiteness. Steam!

"Hey, Prof!" Burke yelped. "What kind of energy's this?"

No answer. Augustine had fainted. He couldn't take it.

While the car swayed and teetered in the mad flight of the tortured beast, Burke clung to the table and studied the instruments. There was an indicator of horizontal speed and a compass. They were traveling east-northeast at ninety miles an hour! The pressure was decreasing. Which meant they were rising as well! Could this thing travel! Burke shut off the energy, just to see what would happen.

Their tremendous pace continued, but the pressure began to mount. The monster was diving. Or was it that? An inspiration; he switched on the energy again. The flaming in the green stuff commenced anew. Once more the pressure outside was decreasing. It was due to a gas generated in those digestive juices by the energy. They were making a veritable balloon of a living creature, their own container plugging its throat to retain the gas.

Burke could envision the bloating of the vast body which was taking place to such an extent that the weight of water displaced was considerably greater than its own. He found he could vary its

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buoyancy by manipulating the rheostat and thus regulate the speed of ascent. They were in the body of a living, though probably slowly dying, submarine balloon that was to an extent navigable. But the creature continued to propel itself madly in the northeasterly direction and this was entirely out of control. "What a belly-ache it must have!" thought Burke, grinning in spite of himself.

HE was careful to keep the current low so they would not rise too swiftly, knowing that if the ascent became so rapid as to permit insufficient time for internal and external pressures to equalize, the creature would explode violently. Though he couldn't see how it would do him any good personally, he had a mad desire to get up to the surface. If the monster should expire then, as undoubtedly it would, and its carcass should float, there was still a bare chance for life. Even if it did mean prison for himself. He wondered how much pressure difference the thickly armored hide of the beast would stand. How much stretching due to the expansion in volume by tissue penetration of the gases. Undoubtedly there was some escape through natural orifices other than the gullet. Enough to act as a safety-valve, he hoped.

Augustine was stirring, groaning. The pressure gauge showed less than two thousand pounds when he tottered to his feet. Burke wasn't at all sure now how nearly this was an accurate indication of depth, since he didn't know the pressure differential between the inside and outside of their animate balloon. He thought this differential could not be very great. Their forward speed was slowing considerably; the monster was losing strength.

The professor gazed disbelievingly at the instruments. "Dick!" he exclaimed. "We're going up. We're saved!"

"Not yet,"—drily. "Think it out, stupid. We've a chance in a million, is all."

Fifteen hundred pounds, a thousand. The swirling green murk outside the ports had almost vanished. Burke could see the distended wall of the creature's stomach. It was dripping great blobs of sticky black stuff from several torn spots. The thing was hemorrhaging internally. He backed off further on the rheostat and the pressure gauge pointer moved slowly toward the lower end of the scale. They would have to keep their carrier intact as long as possible.

Augustine was talking again and was still excited. "You're wrong, Dick. There's more than a chance in a million; there's a *good* chance. Listen: I see you're easing it upward as gently as possible. That's right. We'll make the surface. The monster will die, of course; it's dying now. But it will float when we get up there. The carcass won't burst. Not if the pressures inside and outside are kept from differing too greatly, especially too suddenly. Don't you see?"

"Sure I see. As far as you've gone. So then what?"

"Why, the televis, naturally. We can start calling for help even before we're afloat—a thousand feet before. Our own ship, any ship can easily come to us. We're saved, I tell you!" The professor's voice screeched as he tried to convince himself of his own words.

"Ever stop to think how much battery power this is taking? Take a slant at the charge indicator."

Augustine gasped. The battery charge was already down to thirty percent of full capacity. "I—I didn't think of that," he faltered.

"Lots of things you haven't thought of," sneered Burke. "For one, the mur-

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der rap that'll be facing you if you do get up top alive."

This was a blunder. Burke had underestimated his companion's cunning and the courage which would come from desperation. In fact, he'd talked too much. He'd put ideas into the other's head that wouldn't have sunk in of their own accord.

The professor's voice changed subtly. He moved near and peered at the pressure gauge. "Eight hundred fifty pounds, two thousand feet," he murmured. Then: "You wouldn't turn me in, would you, Dick?"

"What did you do to me?"

Then, taken completely by surprise, Burke went down under the full weight of the enraged scientist. As he lurched from the instrument table, his hand automatically clung to the rheostat handle. He felt it slam over to the full "on" position. Then his grip tore loose.

AUGUSTINE'S pudgy but powerful fingers twisted around his windpipe as they rolled over and over on the floor. Burke tore at them frantically, finally got them free. The squid mustn't explode!

"You fool!" he croaked. "The energy's full on. We'll go up like a shot. We'll—"

The professor, fighting blindly, evidently did not get the import of the scarcely intelligible words. He was pounding at Burke's face with everything he had and it was all the younger man could do to wriggle himself free and roll back against the wall.

"The energy!" he managed to howl before Augustine's two feet struck him together. "You damn—"

He lashed out blindly as pain from the heavy double kick flashed racing torture through his body. With sudden new energy, he scrambled erect and dived for the rheostat. Then he came down hard with his chin on the table. His antagonist had wrapped those huge arms around his knees and was dragging him down. Hell of a way to fight! Thoughts weren't at all clear now to Burke but he knew he must get to that rheostat. They were rising like a rocket.

"Wait, Prof!" he groaned.

He twisted free and lurched upward, starting a swift right to his opponent's bobbing jaw. But it never landed. There came a terrific wrench and a simultaneous crash as of the entire universe disrupting. Then utter blankness.

CHAPTER IV

A Submarine Plateau

BURKE'S first conscious impression was of a continuous six foot length of aching bone and sinew that was obviously his own body, next of something freezing cold and steel-hard that pressed flatly and determinedly against his cheek. He opened an experimental eye. And with it he gazed directly into two frigidly staring optics of the most fearsome creature he had ever beheld. This nightmare object was not more than three feet from his face. He closed the one eye and concentrated his muddled wits on what he had seen. Or had it been hallucination merely? Such things couldn't exist.

It had been like a fish, yet it was not a fish. A head like that of one of the Furies, but larger than a man's, had faced him with such a malevolent stare as only a basilisk might achieve. And the head, though attached to a sinuously scaly body with iridescent fins, was covered with long black hair that streamed upward as if each strand was electrified and straining to be away. The mouth had been most horrible of

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all, with two long curved tusks projecting from the lower jaw to the level of the glaring eyes, and a dozen smaller tusks arching down from the upper jaw. The face itself, if it could be called a face, was a distorted, evilly grinning gargoyle. It was purple. Burke opened both of his eyes suddenly. The thing was still there.

Then his mind began working normally. He remembered. The surface against his cheek was one of the thick glass ports of Augustine's sphere. His aches and pains were from the fight with the professor. No, not from the fight; something had happened. Of course—the big octopus thing had blown up. That accounted for the shock which had stunned him and flung him where he now lay. And they were in the water once more; this was a denizen of the ultimate depths hovering outside that port. Where was Augustine? Was he alive? Recalling his former rash spouting of words, Burke decided to keep quiet until he could learn for himself.

Turning slightly, repressing a groan at the pain it caused, he cast his eyes unward. He was under the instrument table. His attention was drawn by a shuffling of feet on the steel floorplates. Augustine, then, was alive and conscious.

Deep silence followed; there was not even the faint whine of the tiny battery-powered energy generator. Of course, with the monster no more, they would not need that now. Further reflection convinced Burke they hadn't dropped any great distance. The shock of falling to the ocean floor at a depth of even two or three miles would have broken their bones, probably killed them. Slowly he turned his head toward where he'd heard the shuffling.

The professor was seated on the edge of the lower bunk, eating from an opened tin and regarding his curiously. He was somehow changed; his mien was composed, confident, gloating. None of his former panicky nervousness; he was sure of himself now. He actually grinned.

"Nice long sleep you had," he remarked. "Sorry I fell on you."

"Uh-huh." Painfully, Burke crawled out from under the table, his head throbbing as if it would split as he struggled to his feet, where he stood swaying. "Where are we?"

The professor waved his spoon airily toward one of the other ports. "On the very rim of a submarine plateau where our giant creature kindly deposited us when his sudden rise in the watery world rent him asunder."

Burke gasped. Not only was Augustine trying to be flowery in his speech, but what he said was true. Out there in the brilliance of the sphere's floods there showed the edge of a precipice. Vast chunks of the defunct monster draped over its jagged outline, huge oozing and quivering blobs on which a score of miscellaneous horrors of the deep were feeding. The young engineer shuddered. He looked at the pressure gauge. Three hundred forty pounds, eight hundred feet. So near and yet so far. There still remained twenty percent of the battery charge.

"So now what?" he demanded.

"So now the *Scipio* is on her way to haul us up from here. Have someting to eat? You need it." Leering, Augustine passed can and opener.

"You mean you've had them on the televis?" Burke's eyes narrowed. Realizing suddenly that he was very hungry, he opened the tin and ate.

"I HAVE and they're on their way. That damned living sub we were in carried us nearly two hundred miles toward Ireland. But the *Scipio* will

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reach us in a few hours." The triumph in Augustine's insolent stare was patent. He had put something over.

"So then what?" Burke mumbled through a mouthful of corned beef.

The professor shrugged. "Then I go back to work and you go back to jail." His little black eyes glittered and he patted the capsule gun where it lay beside him on the bunk.

"So you frisked me," growled the engineer.

"Why not? The tables had to turn somehow."

"The law's been satisfied. I'm free now, Prof. And you're the one who's in jeopardy. You told me you killed Van den Broek." Burke was only sparring for time and opportunity; he knew what the reaction would be.

Augustine laughed harshly. "Who'd take the word of a convict against mine? And there are two more charges against you now. You'll be a third offender now and will surely be sentenced to life imprisonment, don't forget that."

"What do you mean, two more charges?"

"First degree assault on me for one thing, kidnaping me for another." The professor's grin was ghoulish.

Burke was silent for a long time after this. Everything Augustine had said was true. They wouldn't take his unsupported word that the professor had confessed. And the assault and kidnaping charges were bad—they'd stick. He hadn't thought of those at the time. Then, he hadn't had the faintest idea he'd ever come up alive in this sphere. He'd only thought of taking Augustine with him. Hadn't cared about the rest. Now it was of great importance. But, maybe . . . Burke remembered his foolishness in talking too much previously; now he would keep his own counsel. Get out of this as best he could.

Augustine's eyes never left him nor did his fingers stray far from that destructive capsule projector. He had the upper hand now and he intended to keep things this way.

"But you did kill Van den Broek," Burke said. Whether it would be of any use or not, he determined to get more detail.

"Certainly I did!" Augustine was vigorously defiant. "And for good reason. Time after time he embarrassed me before the Academy of Science. Time after time he bungled my experiments and made a laughing stock of me. He would have ruined me if I had let him live. Of course I killed Van den Broek, but you can't prove it. Nor can anyone else."

"You mean you stole some of his inventions and called them yours. And you were afraid he'd expose you. *That's* why you killed him."

The professor reddened, puffing out his fat cheeks as if about to explode in a tirade. But he subsided, again laughing harshly. "Oh, maybe that did have something to do with it," he admitted. "Might as well admit it to you privately; you'll never be able to tell. It was necessary that Van be removed, necessary too that someone other than myself be found guilty of the murder."

"And that's where I came in," Burke said bitterly. "You hated me for the same reason you hated Van, so you planted the evidence on me."

Augustine now chuckled, much pleased with himself. "Quite right, my boy. And I did it cleverly, too. Used your pistol with a rubber glove on my hand to prevent fingerprints, then put it back in your own drawer, from which I'd taken it. Your cigaret case, which was found beside the body—I put that there, too. And *your* prints were on that. You hadn't a chance and you haven't now."

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"And then when you found I'd won this alternative sentence, you *welded* the ballast weights to the bottom of the car to be sure I'd never come up. Swell setup." Burke talked deliberately with dully hopeless tones. He was getting an idea.

"All true, my boy. I think I've done a pretty good job, even if I missed out on this and nearly lost my own life. With Van out of the way and you behind the bars for life, it will be plain sailing for me now." Fat fingers caressed the capsule gun. "At first I was going to kill you—when the squid blew up. I figured one could live longer than two and knew I could get away with that, too. Self defense, you know. But then I saw where we had landed and found there'd be enough battery and air, so I decided life imprisonment was probably better after all. You won't like that, will you?"

Burke stared at the man in open astonishment. "No, I wouldn't like that," was all he could say.

Augustine was so utterly cold-blooded about it all, so completely sure of himself, so entirely self-satisfied, that it seemed incredible.

AFTER that, Burke wandered aimlessly in the narrow confines of the sphere, tinkering with this instrument and that, always under the professor's watchful eye. Few words passed between them. Each was too occupied with his own thoughts.

There were frequent televis calls, always answered by the older man in pompous voice. World Telecasts came in with a request for a speech and Augustine's triumph knew no bounds.

Burke listened in mounting disgust as he mouthed long strings of superlatives and posed before the iconoscopic scanning eye with the capsule propector against his prisoner's temple for added effect. Forgetting entirely that this was his first deep sea dive in his own or any other contrivance. Bragging of scientific achievment, dramatizing his kidnaping, boasting of subduing a dangerous criminal and returning him to justice, lying blatantly about the means of their salvation from a watery grave, taking full credit to himself. It was sickening. But Burke held his peace.

"See what chance you'll have?" gloated the man, when wiping the perspiration from his brow after this effort.

The engineer did not reply.

Another silent hour passed before the *Scipio* was overhead and her grappling hooks were reaching down for them, taking hold.

Then Augustine played his trump card. "I suppose you think you'll get somewhere mentioning the welded weights," he said.

Burke started. "I had thought of that," he admitted.

The professor drew a slender tube from his pocket with one hand, keeping his prisoner covered with the capsule gun in his other. "Well, you won't do it," he grated. "You know what this is. Your own invention, the psychoneural regrader. It'll blast out your memory of the past ten hours entirely. You will never be able to tell anything of this, because you won't remember. And you get it *now*."

Burke tensed as the tube leveled at him.

CHAPTER V

Battle on the Ocean Floor

KNOWING that no man can perform two differing actions simultaneously with any degree of success in either, Burke took his chances on that last word of the professor's. Figured he was concentrating on the amnesia.

Swinging sharply with his right hand,

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he knocked the regrader from the man's grasp and hooked a stiff left into his paunch at the instant the capsule gun popped. Its deadly missile crashed harmlessly into an instrument panel as Burke's right fist caught Augustine in his gaping mouth, splashing out a gush of blood and knocking him into the bunk. But the professor clung fast to the pistol, gasping, stuttering primeval wrath and spitting out teeth. The engineer clamped on his gun wrist just as the sphere swayed to the tugging cables and commenced rising.

Augustine brought up a knee violently as Burke twisted his thick wrist. Burke went dizzy and weak with pain. His antagonist was a powerful brute, as he'd learned before. It took superhuman efforts of will and half-paralyzed muscles to keep him down and hold to his gun hand at the same time. Slamming away weakly with his right, Burke willed a desperate new accession of vigor into his left and tore the projector loose. It clattered to the floor and he had both fists free to use on the professor. His head was clearing now and muscular strength flowing back. In a few moments the big man was groggy and Burke retrieved both gun and regrader.

"Now!" he rasped, "*I'm* the boss. Get back there." He prodded Augustine with the capsule gun and experienced savage glee at the bulging of his victim's eyes.

"Don't shoot!" babbled the professor. "I'll do anything. I'll—"

"Shut up! Burke twisted a tiny dial on the regrader and pressed its latch. A blue haze bathed Augustine's head for an instant, then vanished as if soaked up by a sponge. A blank look came into the popping eyes and the big man went stiff-limbed as an automaton.

There was a clank overhead. The sphere had ceased rising. They were alongside the *Scipio* — or possibly on deck already. The televis shrilled insistently. Burke switched it off, knowing this would send back an "out-of-order" signal to the ship.

Immediately there were sounds at the manhole. And in two minutes its cover clanked off. Burke shoved the doll-jointed professor through and tumbled after him. They were on the deck of the *Scipio*.

It was to have been a notable occasion. It was, though not as had been intended. They moved into a circle of staring iconoscopic eyes. Above them swung the microphones of the telecasters and high above these hovered a swarm of gyrocopters. The sea around was dotted with bobbing amphibians. Everywhere were goggling human eyes.

The captain of the ship, his officers and most of the crew, were there. There were many strangers in the crowd, some of them obviously dignitaries of one sort or another. This was to have been a crowning triumph for one Professor Augustine.

Burke looked around for the deputies, whom he had thought would be there to rearrest him. Then he remembered; they had returned Zybyski to Sing Sing. He remembered, too, that this was on the high seas. That Captain Jameson was the sole authority. He walked over to that amazed officer and surrendered the capsule.

"What's this all about?" bellowed Jameson, peering amazedly into the blank eyes of Augustine, who stood rigidly before the iconoscopic eyes and microphones. "What have you done to the professor?"

"Nothing serious," Burke assured him. "If you'll give me a chance to prove it, I'll show you and the world that he's a faker. That he's the criminal, not I."

The crowd was closing in around

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them. "Put him in irons!" came a shout. "Hang him to the foremast," another. An angry murmur rose and swelled as the telecasters stood irresolute.

Gun in hand, Captain Jameson faced Burke as his officers and crew gathered around. The surrendering of that gun had confused them, and Augustine's condition made them uncertain.

"What's this all about?" demanded the captain. "I asked you before. Now I want it all."

All over the ship, in the surrounding sea, high in the air, there was commotion. Excitement. Expectation of the unexpected. The cries for Burke's scalp died down. His gray eyes looked frankly and levelly into the captain's brown ones.

"I only ask — first — that you have one of your officers examine the ballast weights of Augustine's sphere and report to you what he finds. Then I believe you'll trust me to show you the rest."

Jameson nodded to the mate.

The first officer was back in a moment. "The weights are welded fast to the shell, Captain," he reported in amazed voice.

"You may proceed, Burke," said Jameson.

DICK moved to Augustine's side and, with the regrader still in his pocket, made a new adjustment. Pressed the latch. The professor was at once erect, his usual debonair self. Seeing the microphones, he blinked, then bowed before the iconoscopic battery. Immediately the telecasters became frantically busy. This was to be the scoop of the year. It was.

Instead of addressing his beloved public in the usual way, the professor wandered a bit over the deck, gazed importantly at the sphere, and began to talk with extreme rapidity.

"Well, my hearties," were his first words. "Ready for the plunge? It won't be long. But while the bag's filling. . . . "

From then on, his words became so rapid they could be followed only with the strictest attention.

" . . . It's all right, boys . . . there's only room for three inside . . . we're d o w n . . . we've submerged . . . I welded the ballast weights . . . I guess I deserve what I'm getting, too . . . Dick, before I die, I must confess. I was the one who killed Van den Broek . . . you wouldn't turn me in, would you, Dick? . . . used your pistol with a rubber glove, then put it back . . . your cigaret case . . . I put that there, too . . . it'll blast out your memory of the past ten hours entirely. . . . "

In a very few minutes it was over. Every word Augustine had used during the past ten hours went out over a world-wide hook-up. For an instant after he had finished he seemed dazed. Everyone on the deck of the *Scipio* was dazed. Even the gyrocopters overhead seemed to be drawing back in astonishment. At millions of televis sets throughout the world must have sat dazed listeners and observers.

Suddenly the great professor came to full realization of what he had done. He leaped for the rail and would have plunged overboard. But Captain Jameson and his officers were too quick for him. They had him under arrest about as quickly as Zybyski had been taken before.

It was the end for Francis Augustine, the beginning for Richard Burke.

LATER, in the captain's cabin, Burke sat before the scanners and mikes and told his story in detail, questioned and prompted by Jameson himself from

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time to time.

"But, Mr. Burke," said the captain, when he had reached the point of the final landing on deck. "Tell the telecast audience what it was that Augustine intended using on you to blank out your memory. What it was you used to force his confession."

"A very simple discovery of my own. One that the professor had st—er—appropriated and which he did not fully understand. It is well known, of course, that the nerve currents and the activities of the cells of the brain itself are electrical or electro-chemical in nature. Well, investigating multitudes of these phenomena, I stumbled upon a means of controlling the nerve and brain impulses in a number of ways. One of these is a simple blocking process. Another is a means of running back along the thought train for any desired period and then blocking to produce amnesia. And this process can be reversed.

"I merely set back Augustine's clock ten hours, so to speak, and left him in a state of complete amnesia and partial neural paralysis. Then, by a simple reverse adjustment of my pocket apparatus, and an increase in the normal thought rate in the normal forward direction, combined with a hypnotic compulsion impulse, I caused him to repeat at greatly accelerated speed, all his speech of the amnesia period. It was really nothing at all."

"Hm-m. Probably not," commented Captain Jameson. "And do you intend to give this invention to the world, Mr. Burke?"

"To the medical profession only, where it may have uses. Do you think it would be safe in other hands, Captain?" laughed Burke.

"Not in hands like Augustine's, that's sure."

The telecasters signed for a cut off and Burke sank back in the captain's own chair with a sigh of relief. "Thank God, that's over," he said.

Upon which there was an insistent shrilling of the captain's personal televis. It was Al Brown, New York State's governor calling for Richard Burke.

"Mr. Burke," his mellow voice started, without preamble. "This entire remarkable performance has been witnessed by me here in Albany. I congratulate you and greet you as an outstanding citizen of our great State. And I wish to assure you that your legal status is clear in all respects. I shall so direct the Attorney-General at once. Good-bye, Mr. Burke and good luck."

CAN A MAN BECOME INVISIBLE?

By JAMES T. BENSON

IN 1934 a young British inventor shocked the countryside with the claim that he could make a man invisible although he stands before you in the flesh. An apparatus was housed in a cabinet which was open in the front and elaborate precautions were taken to keep its operation a secret.

The man who is to disappear is clothed in a strange looking suit referred to as a "spectral mantle." His head was covered with what was called an "electro-helmet." This garb made him somewhat resemble a deep sea diver. He stands in the cabinet on a well lighted stage. When all is ready the man touches contact gloves above his head with both hands and an electric current is turned on. Gradually the current is increased and as it does so the man takes on a transparent look. Then, starting from the feet and going up, the man completely disappears. It is claimed the subject is tangible and yet completely invisible. To prove this, observers are asked to verify the man's presence by touching him. All report that they can touch him and are unable to see him.

Several attempts were made to learn the secret of the device. One of these was the taking of photographs showing successive stages of the demonstration. However, these revealed only what the human eye saw.

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» LILINE, « THE MOON GIRL

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

"DAVID, awaken!" The voice came again to David Madden, and the strange vision that for six long years had haunted his dreams. He knew that he was sleeping, and he knew that the vision of Liline was coming.

Madden's mind seemed strangely divorced from his sleeping body. He seemed somehow to *see* himself lying there in slumber in his bare bedroom, a hand protecting his eyes from the silvery moonlight. A white shape, that swept down a silver pathway. Coming closer, gliding down the beam and through his open window, until it hovered above his sleeping form.

It was—Liline.

He recognized her in his dreams. She was as always, supernally strange, supernally beautiful.

Her face was clearest, as always. A soft oval, with dark hair brushed back from a high, broad forehead, with dark eyes that were always so serious and tender, looking down now at his sleeping form in apprehension.

"David, you must *awake!*" she was whispering as her misty figure bent over him. Now that was strange, David Madden thought in his dream. Never before had Liline wanted him to awake. She had always discouraged him, tried to induce him to abandon the work that for six years had engrossed him. But now there was a new urgency in her face.

"Liline!" he murmured in his dream. "You've come again—"

"The rocket—in danger, David!" she kept whispering urgently in the dream. "Awake—you *must*—"

The sheer fear in her face reached his own heart. He felt his pulse leap with vague terror. Suddenly, he was awake. Dazedly, David Madden sat up in bed and looked a little wildly around. He was in his familiar, bare little bedroom in the bungalow near the rocket-workshops. It was past midnight. The solemn stillness of the deep night was unbroken. The solemn black crags of the Colorado mountains were sentinels on the lonely plateau.

He looked out. In the middle distance, beyond the low, dark workshops, the towering metal bulk of the rocket *Moonflower II* loomed like a huge upright torpedo from its cradle. Nearer to him a similar but smaller tarnished metal bulk towered from a similar cradle.

Madden's blond, worn young face was taut in the silver light, his blue eyes wide as he stared out. He tried to dismiss his alarm. After all, Liline was

A STRANGE, sweet voice comes to David Madden in his dreams, and warns him of an awful menace on the moon. What was the strange secret of the flame and its lovely watchers?

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only a figment of dreams. For six years, for all the time that she had appeared in his dreams, he had known that this vision of her was only a product of his own overpowering obsession.

DAVID MADDEN'S obsession was the moon. For years, it had been the goal of all his hopes. For he meant to be the first man ever to reach that barren, shining sphere. The first man ever to reach another world.

That was why he had spent years here on this lonely plateau, spending his inherited fortune in unending research and rocket-trials. First alone, and more lately with the help of Theron Leigh.

His obsession with that purpose, Madden knew, was why this strangely persistent dream had haunted him, warning him over and over, with grave persistence, that he must give up his rockets and abandon his hopes of reaching the moon.

Liline. Her name had somehow come to him. Madden knew she must have been born of his own too-desperate obsession, expressing his own subconscious fears and doubts. Yet—it was a strangely dear illusion, one whose coming he had eagerly awaited in his dreams.

But now—this fear and warning! But if Liline were only . . . then this vague alarm he felt must come from the depths of his own mind? Madden felt that there was something wrong. He could sense something furtive and menacing, taking place tonight.

He dressed quickly. He wouldn't arouse Theron Leigh—there was no reason—but he needed to reassure his disturbed imagination, before he could sleep again.

Outside in the nipping chill of the Colorado night, everything on the plateau slept in silver silence. He felt a little ashamed of his apprehensions as he walked on toward the workshops. He was getting jumpy, he told himself. But no wonder, with the start into the void scheduled only two days ahead.

Madden came to the drab, looming bulk of the *Moonflower I* just beyond the workshops. A dull, corroding mass, squatting in its cradle of girders like an earthbound bird. He could still remember his black disappointment when Rocket One had proved unsafe for flight and the temptation that had assailed him to give up his apparently futile work. And in his dreams, that vision of Liline had urged him to abandon his work.

But he had built another! The *Moonflower II,* with the help of Theron Leigh, had been built in two years of ceaseless work. Madden's eyes clung fondly, as he advanced, to the clean gleaming bulk towering there so proudly beyond the low supply-sheds. Ready to start, in two more days—

Abruptly, he stiffened. In the shadows at the base of Rocket Two, he glimpsed a shadowy, moving form!

A FURTIVE figure, carrying a case of instruments toward the gangway that led up to the open door of the rocket. It could not be one of his own workmen—they had been paid off a few days before.

Madden plunged forward with an inarticulate cry. The hurrying man in the shadows dropped his burden and whirled around. A pistol leaped into his hand, gleaming in the moon.

"Stop!" he ordered harshly.

Madden looked unbelievingly at the man who confronted him with the gun. "Jacob Graff!" he exclaimed—for he had recognized that lean, purposeful figure; that harsh, forceful, aquiline face and domineering black eyes.

"Yes, my dear young Madden, it is I," Graff said raspingly. "And I am

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just about ready to take off."

"Take off? Good Lord—do you mean that you are—"

"I'm stealing your rocket, yes," Jacob Graff said coolly. "You wouldn't sell it to me, Madden. So I'm taking it."

Madden stared dazedly. It had been only a week before that this European scientist who called himself Doctor Jacob Graff had come to the lonely plateau. Graff had offered to buy the *Moonflower II*. Had made an astounding offer for it.

"Your rocket should be able to reach the moon," Graff had said. "I've followed your progress lately and I want that rocket. I want to be the first man on the moon—I've *got* to be. I built a rocket myself, but it was a failure. Then I read of your *Moonflower II*. I must have it. My syndicate will pay ten million dollars for it."

"Would you sell your life for ten million dollars?" Madden had demanded. "That's what this rocket is to me—my life."

Graff had seen the uselessness of further offers. He had left. But now here he was—stealing The Rocket. "You wouldn't sell," Graff was repeating harshly. "And I've got to be the first man on the moon, Madden. I told you that. There's something there that I must get—for the Master."

"The Master?"

Then enlightenment flashed over Madden. He suddenly realized Graff's nationality, as he recognized his accent. "I know you now!" he cried. "Graff—the rocket-engineer of the Central Empire—your Master is the Central dictator!"

"Yes," rasped Jacob Graff. Fanaticism burned in the lean engineer's black eyes. "The Master—whom I serve, and who needs a means of enforcing his demand for expansion!"

"That strutting tyrant who has menaced world peace for years," said Madden. "You want to go to the moon to get something for *him?*"

Graff's eyes blazed. His voice was thick with fanaticism, his lean, dark face transfigured.

"The secret—the thing on the moon that I have discovered will make our Empire irresistible!" he exclaimed. "And mine shall be the honor of going after it—"

"You're not going in *my* rocket!" Madden said slowly.

He plunged forward. And Graff shot.

MADDEN felt a crashing shock against his skull. Wildly, he fought to keep from losing consciousness. He heard, as though from a great distance, Jacob Graff running up the gangway into the *Moonflower II*.

There came the slam and grind of the rocket door closing. Madden heard dimly the thin, remote voice of Aneron Leigh, shouting in alarm. He knew that Leigh had been awakened by the shot and was coming running.

Then a colossal, thunderous roar of sound broke. Madden felt the ground heave and rock violently under him. A wave of superheated gases rolled over him scorchingly. His mind slipped into throbbing darkness.

CHAPTER II

Pursuit into the Void

DARKNESS, darkness—he seemed floating in it, and there came through the blackness of his mind a misty, shining shape, gliding swiftly into his mental vision.

Liline! Slender, lovely moon-wraith, her dark hair blowing, her white face pale and urgent with alarm. "David, listen to me!" she was crying to him,

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in far, thin, silver tones. *"Listen!"*

"Liline," his mind seemed to murmur as he floated in that dark sea of unconsciousness. "I see you—I hear you—but you're not real—"

"David, I *am* real! It is my mind that meets your mind, that has done so for long, in your dreams. But my body is as real as yours, though it is far from yours.

"The real I, the real Liline, dwells in the moon, David. I am one of the last of the Watchers of the Fire, who for generations have kept ward and watch upon the forbidden flame. I and Tula, my sister—we two are the last of the Watchers, the last of the moon-folk. It is our duty to keep any from attaining the Fire. That is why I have long discouraged you in your rash resolve to reach the moon.

"But now there is danger, David—terrible danger. I have seen with my mind. The man Graff who has stolen your rocket is even now speeding toward the moon. He comes to steal the forbidden Fire for his master."

Madden's darkened mind quailed beneath the terrifying impact of the girl's anxiety and dread.

"It is the duty of my sister and me to prevent him from stealing the Fire," Liline was crying. "But my sister Tula has forgotten her duty. She is weary of our lonely life here and longs to go to Earth. It was Tula who inspired the man Graff to come here, speaking to him in his sleep as I have spoken to you, offering to give Graff the precious Fire if he will take us to Earth.

"Death for your earth, if Graff brings back the Fire to it, David! A death more horrible than you can imagine. He must not reach the Fire. Alone, with my sister against me, I fear I cannot prevent him. You must help me—you must follow, swiftly and at once, to the moon!"

Her voice in the dream was fading, her shining, misty figure vanishing, as consciousness began to return to Madden.

"Liline!" he felt himself crying desperately. "Liline, I cannot follow—I have no way—"

"Follow!" murmured the last, fading accents of the vanishing vision. "For the life of your world, David—"

She was gone—the stupor of unconsciousness was lifting from him, and she was passing with it.

Stinging tides of pain rolled across David Madden's brain, as consciousness came back. He groaned, and felt hands supporting him.

"DAVID!" an anxious voice was crying in his ear.

He opened his eyes. He lay there in the moonlight upon the ground. Theron Leigh, his thin, middle-aged face desperately anxious, was supporting him.

"David, what happened?" the scientist was crying. "Our rocket — it's gone!"

"Jacob Graff stole it," Madden said thickly, trying to sit up. Great waves of weakness and pain were surging through him. With a shaking hand he felt his head. Graff's bullet had torn a furrow in his scalp. Leigh had bound it up with a handkerchief to stop the bleeding.

"Graff gone in the *Moonflower* II?" Theron Leigh whispered in stunned amazement. "My God—why—"

"He's gone to the moon," Madden choked. His blue eyes were wild as he looked up. He pointed a trembling hand. "Some tremendous weapon is there and Graff wants it for his master, the Central dictator. It's something called the Fire," he said thickly. "A mysterious Fire of some kind, in the moon. Liline told me—"

"Liline?" repeated Theron Leigh, his

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thin face pale and wondering.

Madden told the scientist. Told him of Liline, of the phantom moon-girl who had visited his dreams for years, who had tried always to dissuade him from building a moon-rocket. And who tonight had warned him of the dread possibilities ahead.

Leigh's face grew strange as he listened. But he did not react skeptically, as Madden half-expected.

"It's possible, then," Theron Leigh muttered. "Perhaps some sort of extra-sensory perception is a reality. This Liline—she has that power, can contact your subconscious mind in sleep or stupor. But—a girl in the moon? And she said she had a sister—the last two of a lunar people? It seems impossible. And yet—"

"I believe in her, utterly," Madden said. He had stumbled to his feet and his face was feverish as he clutched the little scientist's thin shoulder.

"Leigh, she begged me to follow Graff! She told me that if Graff brings back the Fire to Earth, it means a black evil loosed upon our world — a world already riven by war. We must go after Graff—to the moon—to stop him."

Theron Leigh's fine, thin face became more pallid, and a shadow of dread like the shadow of approaching eclipse darkened his dilated gray eyes.

"But we *can't* follow, David! Graff has taken the *Moonflower* II—and it would take us two years to build another like it."

"We can follow—in *Moonflower* I," Madden said coldly.

THERON LEIGH recoiled from the suggestion. "Good God, David, that would be suicide! You know as well as I that the rocket is rotten with defects!"

"It's our only chance to follow Graff."

Leigh's gray eyes were clouded dark with fear. "We'd be staking our lives on the thinnest chance," he muttered. "The firing-tubes might blow out—the flawed plates might give way—" and then Leigh paused, his lips thin. "You're right. We must follow, in *Moonflower* I."

And now, even in the driving urgency of overshadowing peril, David Madden felt a queer pulse of joy. Liline was real—he knew it, now. The moon-girl of his dreams, real and living—and he was going to her.

When the next day had passed, when night came again to the lonely plateau, Madden and Theron Leigh had almost finished their frenzied preparations. The rocket ship had been moved in its cradle of girders, so that it pointed to exactly the right quarter of space. The eight cellular firing-sections at its base, each of which would be blown away as its fuel was used, had been filled with the highly explosive and unstable liquid fuel.

Two space-suits—ones that they had devised several years before—they put into the rocket. The newer, better suits they had made were in Rocket Two, with Graff.

All their equipment was faulty, flawed, discarded. It seemed mad to think that they could succeed with this defective rocket and equipment.

The moon rose. It was slightly past its full now, shadow eating at its limb, a blank, shining mystery, spinning up into the heavens.

"Graff—he must already have landed out there," Leigh muttered, staring upward.

"Help me with these tanks!" Madden cried. "We've only two hours more!"

Zero hour was one hour before midnight. The calculated moment when Rocket One must rush out at a speed topping seven miles a second, to escape Earth's gravitational grip.

The two men, panting and reeling

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with fatigue, climbed the ladder to the door in the nose of the rocket.

Theron Leigh's thin face was bloodless as his fingers fumbled to fasten the straps of the shock-absorbing harnesses. Madden unlocked the bank of eight keys that controlled the eight firing-cells. "Watch the chronometer — tell me when," he said harshly.

His finger poised above the key of the sternmost firing-cell. The drone and throb of the oxygenator was the only sound.

"Time!" cried Leigh.

Madden's finger jabbed down the first firing-key.

He had expected a tremendous shock. He was not prepared for the awful and cataclysmic reality.

The world seemed to explode in an ear-splitting roar. Tortured springs of his recoil-harness shrieked rustily as he and Leigh were flung deep into the shock-absorbing harnesses. His brain felt as though lightning had struck him.

So much more terrible was the shock than he had expected, that he thought at first that both he and Leigh had been annihilated. Then as his stunned ears regained faint power of hearing, he dimly heard Theron Leigh's cry.

"David, all eight of the firing-cells let go! Not just one—all of them!"

Madden forced pain-throbbing eyes open, focused his blurred gaze on the illuminated dials.

It was true. The exploding of the sternmost firing-cell had touched off all the eight cells. The whole back half of the rocket had been blown off in the start—all its fuel flaming out to hurl it at terrific speed away from Earth. *Moonflower I* was now only a powerless metal shell, racing through the void toward the moon!

"The cells—they were flawed," Leigh muttered. "The explosion back-blasted from one to another. All the fuel's gone! And we've no power to break our fall onto the moon. We've no power to get back to Earth—ever."

"We'll get back," Madden said savagely. "The second *Moonflower* is on the moon. We'll find it and come back in it—after we've found Graff."

He peered out, sick and shaken. A pitch-black abyss yawned before them. The countless stars were like brilliant witch-fires. And far ahead in the great vault swam the gleaming sphere of the moon. The craters and ranges on its shining face standing out bold and clear. Madden stared shakenly. World of his dreams, savage, airless, barren satellite that he had watched so often. And now he was hurtling toward it—and toward Liline.

CHAPTER III

Disaster on the Moon

HOURS sped on into eternity, as the rocket rushed soundlessly on. The earth, misty, cloud-veiled, huge, bulking vast in the heavens behind them. And ahead, the silver moon-sphere, a stupendous, white-glaring panorama of peaks and craters and blank plains.

Theron Leigh had focused the little telescope whose lens was inset in the rocket wall, and was peering through it. His thin form still trembled from sickness and shock.

"Our rocket—I see it!" he cried. "West of Bulliadus crater—"

Madden sprang to his side, and applied his eye to the lens. Into his vision sprang magnified a section of the white lunar plain near the towering ring of Bulliadus crater. Something there on the broad plain flashed and glittered metallicly.

"Graff may still be near the rocket—he's been less than twenty-four hours on the moon. If we can land near it,

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and find him—"

Leigh laughed mirthlessly. "Land near him? We have no way of steering or braking now, with our power gone. We'll just have to trust to chance, to land alive."

The *Moonflower* I swept down in a dwindling curve, caught in the gravitational grip of the great satellite.

At five hundred miles altitude they sped smoothly around the western limb. On around the moon, in that steadily decreasing spiral.

Beneath lay a landscape no man on Earth had ever seen—the other side of the moon. It was little different from the familiar side. Giant craters and stupendous mountain ranges, and flat desert plains. But all cloaked in shadow. And then a thin edge of dazzling brightness showed ahead, broadening. They had circled the dark side of the moon and were coming back to its sunlit face, and dropping.

"We'll hit in a half hour at this rate," Theron Leigh muttered. "And not far from Bulliadus, I think."

"Put on your space-suit," Madden said. "If the rocket cracks up in landing, it may give us a chance."

They donned the bulky, air-tight garments of leathery fabric, and screwed on the windowed helmets. Each made sure that the tank of his suit was pumped full of highly compressed oxygen. Then they clumsily strapped themselves into the recoil harnesses again, adjusted their suits' telephonic connection, and waited.

They could make out great, black fissures in the lunar plain below. Cracks in the moon, opening into unguessable depths. Lower the rocket sagged—

"We're going to hit!" came Leigh's shrill, muffled cry. "And we're still a long way from Bulliadus!"

Madden's gloved hands gripped the bars of his chair. Soundlessly, the metal shell sagged downward. The jagged lunar plain rushed up toward them—

CRASH! The springs of Madden's harness screamed and broke. He felt himself catapulted back against a wall. He lay, breath knocked out by the shock, more than half dazed. The whole control-room was topsy-turvy.

Then in the silence, he heard the thin, hissing scream of gas. He knew what it was. Air escaping from the wrecked rocket and its riven tanks. "Leigh!" he called hoarsely, his voice loud in his helmet, his head ringing with pain.

Theron Leigh was moving in his harness. His space-suited figure stirred clumsily.

"All — right," his muffled voice reached Madden by the telephone. "Thank God for the weakness of lunar gravitation. It's all that kept us from being squashed like flies."

Both men, clinging to hold themselves upright, stared around them. The walls of the rocket were crumpled and cracked. Outside a shattered quartz window lay a white, glaring desert beneath a night-black sky of stars.

"The oxygen-tanks are gone," Madden gritted. "That means we've got to get to the other rocket before the oxygen in our suit-tanks is exhausted, or we'll die. Six hours, maybe—"

"Fifty miles away," Theron Leigh said quietly. "Beyond Bulliadus crater. We can never make it."

"We've got to! We'll get to the *Moonflower* II, replenish our oxygen, and then find Jacob Graff—and Liline."

"Liline?" said Leigh. "I believed it before, but can anything live on this ghastly airless world?"

"Liline and her sister are somewhere here," Madden nodded. "We'll find them, and Graff. But first—the rocket."

Time was precious. Each minute was further decreasing the amount

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of oxygen in their suit-tanks. They clambered clumsily to the door, wrenched it open, and emerged into the lunar day.

NIGHTMARE landscape greeted their eyes. The glaring white plain of calcined dust and stone, stretching to the towering peaks that rimmed a horizon incredibly close. Overhead bulked the incredibly huge cloudy gray sphere of Earth. Its vast, veiled sphere seemed to fill the heavens. And beyond it, the sun glared fiercely, beating down with a scorching heat they could feel even through their insulated suits.

The two men started westward, toward the fanged peaks. They moved with a queer, floating drag. Only the lead weights fastened to the belts of their suits kept them from floating into the air with each step, so slight was the pull of lunar gravity.

The wreck of their rocket vanished from sight behind them as they forged on. Neither man spoke, as they toiled forward. A fissure blocked their path. A chasm several hundred feet across, running northwest to southeast. They stopped, baffled.

Madden peered down into the chasm. It seemed a bottomless abyss of blackness. He thought he could make out faint green light far below—or were his strained eyes deluding him?

"We must skirt this fissure northwestward," Leigh was saying. "It won't take us far out of our path."

Presently, indeed, they came to the head of the fissure, and passed around it and headed straight west again. But they had lost precious minutes and oxygen in the detour.

Bulliadus' crater-peaks seemed little nearer, as they forged on. Foreknowledge of doom began to toll in David Madden's heart like a cold bell. He was going to die here on the moon.

Four hours had passed, and the peaks of Bulliadus loomed appreciably nearer and larger, when Theron Leigh fell. The little scientist struggled weakly to rise, his gloved hands clutching the calcined white dust.

"Can't—go much further," he gasped as Madden helped him up. "Better go on—without me—take what oxygen I have left."

"No!" Madden grunted. "We'll win through! The rocket can't be far away now—"

"Twenty miles, at least," Leigh's dry, hopeless whisper came over the telephonic connection.

But he stumbled on, beside Madden. They passed another fissure, another fissure, another black abyss that ran east and west, and lay a little north of their course. Madden dreaded to see one of the chasms across their path at any moment.

He cut the rate of flow from his oxygen-tank, and Leigh followed his example. It would lengthen the time left them. But the lessening of the oxygen began rapidly to bring on a dizziness and shortness of breath.

In a half hour, Leigh fell again. And this time he lay without attempt to rise.

"Done for," came his choking whisper.

Madden's head was roaring, his breath coming in short, thick gasps. The trickle of oxygen from his tank seemed rapidly diminishing.

Madden lifted up Theron Leigh and staggered forward, a step — two — and then he fell! His bleared, hazing eyes could no longer make out the peaks of Bulliadus ahead. He lay for a long minute across Leigh's motionless body. His whirling mind, his aching muscles and starved lungs, craved rest.

He staggered up once more, reeled blindly forward, carrying his com-

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panion. But when he fell again, Madden knew it was the end. Darkness came mercifully over his brain in long, slow waves. The reward, he was thinking numbly, of six years of toil and hopes and dreams. . . . death — and Jacob Graff going ahead . . . rest . . . he wanted only to rest. . . .

"David, don't give up!"

Out of the welling darkness that was sweeping over him in soothing tides, Liline's crystal, frantic voice reached his mind. As though from very close at hand, now—very loud.

"David, I've been trying to tell you! But I could not reach your mind while it was awake. You must get to one of the fissures—the nearest one. Get there with your friend—and jump in."

"Jump in?" Madden thought dazedly. "But that would be death—"

"Not death, but life! Get to the fissure, and jump."

"I can't do it—I can never do it." Madden's thoughts were wandering. "I can't get up again. Liline—"

"No!" Frantic, desperate pleading in the silver voice that rang inside his mind. "Get up—for me! And for your world! Even now, the man Graff is with my sister, Tula, plotting to possess the Fire. You *must* get up."

Madden was dimly aware that he still lay with Theron Leigh upon the glaring lunar plain. His lungs seemed on fire—the last trickle of oxygen from his tank was lessening.

He reeled to his feet. It was a ghastly effort to do that, and another to reach down and pick up Leigh's slight, helmeted form. More by instinct than by conscious design, he staggered northward. He felt the last strength and life running out of him like the final sands of an hourglass.

And suddenly, the fissure was before him—a black, awesome chasm yawning across his path.

The oxygen from his tank had ceased. His flaming lungs seemed ready to burst. And then, like a spent animal lurching forward to die, still clutching his senseless companion, he reeled forward off the edge of the fissure and plunged falling into the abyss.

CHAPTER IV

The Girl in the Moon

DOWN, down—that fall was weirdly like a fall in a dream, to David Madden's dulling mind. His sensations were chaotic in the moments that he and Leigh plunged downward, turning over and over in the blackness. He dimly perceived that there was light below—green, faint glowing light.

And then he heard the whistling of *air* around his helmet as he fell. They were tumbling down now through air and not through empty space!

Green, vague spaces unfolded with terrifying rapidity beneath them. Shining green-patched walls flashed up past them. And they met the bottom of the fissure.

Not with a rending shock, but as though they had alighted softly upon a great cushion, did they strike bottom. The shock jolted Madden's weakened brain and body into a last effort.

He fumbled with a stiffening hand at the escape-valve of his helmet. It opened — and precious, life-giving air rushed into his helmet, into his starved lungs.

Leigh was lying half across him, as he had fallen. In a moment, Madden had his companion's helmet off. He ascertained that Leigh's heart still beat. The older man began to twitch and stir, as strength returned.

David removed his own helmet and stared around him weakly. The scene that surrounded him was unearthly.

A cavern of great size, illuminated by

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an eldritch green glow, stretched around them. Its towering walls of jagged black rock supported a rocky roof. The green glow that illuminated this cavern came from eerily shining fungi like huge mushroom growths, that grew upon the cavern floor and crowded the soft black soil as far as the eye could reach.

Madden discovered that he and Leigh had fallen upon one of the huge fungi. Their space-suits were smeared with the shining green fibers they had crushed beneath them. Madden turned. His companion had regained consciousness, and was gazing about with wild, dilated eyes.

"We're beneath the moon's surface," Madden told him. "Liline reached my mind as I was near death, up there, and told me to jump with you into the fissure. It's all that saved us—the air down here."

"Air, here beneath the moon's surface," Leigh whispered. "Then they were right, the astronomers who suggested that the moon's atmosphere long ago drained into a cavernous interior. Yet this place—incredible!"

They got to their feet, still weak and trembling, and divested themselves of the heavy space-suits. Each movement made their bodies aware of abnormal lightness. Madden gazed down the length of the great, green-glowing space but he could not see the end of the cavern.

"David, *look!*" Leigh suddenly shouted.

The older man was pointing wildly down the green-lit cavern, toward the haze that veiled its farther spaces.

Something there was moving—something black coming with flapping wings, flying through the green-lit spaces toward them.

"A bird?" whispered Theron Leigh, his thin face frozen as he stared.

"Too big," Madden exclaimed. "It looks like an enormous flying *lizard*." Then he cried, "That's what it is! And it's seen us!"

He clawed out the heavy pistol in his jacket pocket, and wildly raised the weapon.

THE thing that was flying toward them down the vast, green-glowing moon cavern was a monstrosity. A gigantic black winged lizard, whose flapping, leathery pinions had a spread of forty feet, and from whose barrel-shaped body projected a long, snaky neck that ended in a turtle-like head. The flapping of its wings was like a threshing thunder in the eery stillness of the cavern.

Madden shot. The crack of the pistol was followed by a hissing cry of fear or rage from the winged monster. It curved sharply upward. Then a silver voice pealed down to them.

"David, don't shoot! It is I—Liline!"

"Liline!" cried Madden, staring wildly upward.

Liline—riding the back of the enormous flying lizard. He saw her, now, as the lizard curved fearfully away.

A slim, white-robed shape, clinging to the back of the scaled, winged monster. Dark hair flying back in the wind, her face a white blur as the frightened lizard sped past.

They heard her crying in silvery tones to the creature. And presently, with wings flapping, it curved around and came back down through the greenish gloom.

Cautiously, fearfully, the giant beast came to rest on short, thick legs, a hundred yards from them, crushing the shining fungi under its webbed feet. Liline's slim figure leaped from its back and came running lightly through the glowing growths toward them.

David Madden's heart pounded furi-

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ously as the girl approached. She paused, and for a silent moment he gazed with wild, yearning excitement into her face.

Phantom moon-girl of his dreams, at last standing real and living before him! Her soft, childlike white face clear and beautiful now as it had been in the dreams, her dark eyes pulsing with strange emotion. She was garbed in a short white robe of silken stuff, belted by a jewelled girdle. Her black hair was tossed back from her broad, high forehead, her slender, youthfully rounded arms and legs bare.

Earth-man and moon-girl, they stood gazing breathlessly into each other's faces in the greenish glow of the shining fungi, oblivious to all else. And then they moved toward each other. And David Madden found Liline in his arms.

"It's not real," he said.

"David!" she whispered. Her dark eyes were misted pools as she looked up at him. "I've always loved you since first my mind came to you, years ago. Even though I thought that never should we two meet, who were separated, on different worlds."

"And though I thought that *you* were only a wraith of my dreams, I loved you, Liline—I always did, I always will."

Strange climax to those six years of haunted dreams—this meeting in the eldritch moon-cavern! The strangeness of it shook him, even as he held Liline warm and living in his arms.

Then both turned and approached Leigh. "You—David's f r i e n d—*my* friend," Liline said to the staring older man, a warm smile lighting her face.

"Why, I can understand you!" Leigh exclaimed incredulously. "Even though you're not speaking English, or any other language I know."

Madden suddenly realized the queerness of that. "Liline, how is it that we are able to understand you?"

"It is my mind that speaks to your mind, that you understand, David," the girl told him. "We of the Watchers always spoke thus to each other and to our beasts. We Watchers could always cast our minds afar, even to other worlds. That is how I was able to send my mind to you when your mind slept, David. But there is not time to explain now," she said rapidly. "You must come with me and prevent the man Graff from reaching the Fire!"

"But what *is* the Fire, Liline?" Madden said, bewilderedly.

"We dare not delay here for explanations," Liline said urgently. "We must return at once to the dead city where the man Graff plots with my sister Tula. But this much I will tell you—the Fire is a blaze of atomic energy in a space at the center of the moon—a mass of matter flaming through the ages by the conversion of its electrons into pure energy."

"Atomic fire?" David Madden exclaimed stunnedly.

"Good God!" cried Theron Leigh. "Atomic energy in the hands of Graff's country, of that mad dictator!"

"If the Fire is taken to Earth," said Liline, "if Graff's people try to use it as a weapon, it will sooner or later escape them and run wild, and it will consume Earth itself in a leaping blaze of atomic force if it gets loose!"

THERON LEIGH was pale, his thin face haggard. "Couldn't we get up to the *Moonflower II* and go back to Earth in it, and leave Graff marooned here?" he asked hoarsely.

Liline shook her dark head. "The man Graff is a cunning scientist. Sooner or later, with Tula's help, he would manage to build a rocket to take him and the Fire to Earth. No, we must prevent Graff from reaching the Fire

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at all. We must hurry, before he and Tula go to it!"

The girl turned and uttered a cry to the huge winged lizard that waited nearby. The lizard came slowly forward, its short, thick legs crushing down the green-glowing fungi as it crossed the cavern to their side. Its small red eyes were intently watching David and Leigh.

Liline laid a hand upon the creature's neck, and vaulted lightly to its back. "Mount with me!" she called urgently to the two men. "There is no time to lose!"

David forced himself to step toward the unearthly beast, though his hackles rose at its proximity. Gingerly, he leaped upward as Liline had done. The girl reached down and helped Theron Leigh climb up to their side. The lizard's enormous bulk twitched uneasily under them.

"To the city, Zah!" ordered the girl.

At once the great beast ran forward over the glowing fungi, and as it ran, its huge wings unfolded with a threshing whir. Those giant, scaly wings flapped vigorously, and the lizard flew straight down the length of the vast, green-glowing cavern.

David Madden felt a sense of nightmare unreality, as he and Leigh clung to the mighty creature's back and were borne on through one cavernous space after another. Always, they descended to lower levels.

They were penetrating down into the maze of caverns that honeycombed the moon, Madden realized. A dimly lighted world of green haze and grotesque, giant fungi. He glimpsed big, shelled creatures like great turtles browsing here and there on the fungi. And he saw other flying lizards like Zah, and similar but smaller creatures of a different species.

Liline's small hand clasping his wrist seemed his only contact with reality. In the girl's lovely white face was a great fear. And that fear—fear of Jacob Graff's bold and terrible plan and what it might bring to a war-torn Earth—chilled David Madden too as they flew deeper and deeper into the somber caverns of the moon.

CHAPTER V

The Flame Within

LILINE leaned forward and called to the lizard over the rush of wind that beat against them.

"Faster, Zah! Faster!"

"God—all this—incredible!" Theron Leigh was muttering, his thin face pale and awe-stricken in the ghostly green glow of the cavern through which they were flying. "Life inside the moon—"

"Only two lives like yours," Liline reminded him. "Only Tula and I, the last two of the Watchers."

"Liline, where did your people come from?" David asked her. "Was the moon once colonized by Earthmen?"

"It was the other way about, David. It was the people of the moon, who long ages ago, colonized the earth."

"What?" he cried incredulously. "But that's impossible—"

"It is so. Long ages ago, when Earth was a steaming ball too hot for life the moon had cooled and was a green, blossoming world. On the moon life arose and evolved. Ancestors of both you and I were those ancient moon-people!

"But as ages passed, the moon's surface withered. Its slighter gravitation could not hold the air and water on its surface. Only the air and water inside the cavernous interior still remained. The moon-people had retreated into the caverns, but in those sunless spaces, their numbers decreased. In desperation, their scientists secretly attempted

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a forbidden experiment. They tried to kindle atomic energy that might make the caverns more habitable.

"That was the origin of the Fire, David! But when the Fire blazed up in the central hollow of the moon, they found it was a terrible and perilous thing. So the ancient moon-folk left the Fire alone. They decided to give up the attempt to make the moon-caverns more habitable, and to migrate to Earth, which by then had cooled somewhat. They built ships, in which they made the perilous voyage across the void to Earth.

"But they left here on the moon, in these caverns, the scientists who had kindled the Fire, and their families, as punishment for their forbidden experiment. They were to remain on the moon and guard the Fire, lest any rash or ambitious one try to bring it to Earth. The Watchers of the Fire abided by that sacred duty always, and their children after them, generation after generation while time endured.

"The moon-folk who migrated to Earth found Earth an inimical world. It was a time of great mountain-building, when land and sea-changes constantly destroyed their cities. Rapidly they retrogressed toward savagery, and soon they had no memory of their lunar origin. These savages were the ancestors of the present Earth races!

"But here inside the moon, the Watchers lived on, while their numbers steadily diminished. Around twenty years ago, there were but two of them left, the parents of Tula and myself. And when they died, Tula and I were left alone here.

"We two were lonely in this dead world, David! That is why I used the ancient mind-knowledge and sent my mind to Earth, night after night. When I contacted *your* mind, David, and realized your ambition to come here, I tried to dissuade you, as was my duty as Watcher of the Fire.

"But my sister Tula, in her loneliness, sought to induce someone to come here—someone who would take her to Earth. She contacted the mind of the man Jacob Graff, who had been studying by scientific instruments the invisible force-rays that emanate from the Fire. And Tula, in her bitterness, told Graff by mental contact that if Graff came hither, she would give him some of the Fire!"

The lizard Zah was flying now down a slanting chasm of darkness in which few of the shining fungi grew. Ahead and below, the opening of a great dim-lighted space began to grow larger.

"We near the dead moon city," Liline whispered. "David, I am afraid. If we cannot stop Graff and Tula from taking the Fire to Earth—there will be a cosmic disaster—"

THERON LEIGH, clinging behind them on the scaled back of the rushing lizard, had a marble paleness on his ascetic face.

"Atomic fire—kindling on Earth," he muttered horrifiedly. "Getting loose—blazing up over the whole planet. Graff is mad to try to use such a thing as a war-weapon!"

"The Dictator," said Madden, "and his eternal cry of expansion is behind it all."

Now they were flying down out of the dark chasm into a vast, greenish-lit space. The mightiest cavern they had yet seen, lying deep here beneath the lunar crust.

"See—the city of my people!" Liline exclaimed. "The city they built long ago here in the caverns."

Madden's eyes widened at sight of the place. It was like the dead city of a weird dream.

The cavern was vast—two miles

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across, hundreds of yards high. Illuminated eerily by the shining green fungi that grew in every unoccupied space, apparently planted there purposely to give light.

An unearthly city occupied almost the whole floor of the cavern. Thousands upon thousands of low, roofless buildings of black lunar rock, ranged geometrically in paved streets and squares.

No men or women moved in those streets of the age-old lunar city. No laughter or voices stirred the silence, no children played in the broad squares. In deathly silence, drained of life, lay this moon-metropolis of long ago, with its long streets and sacred buildings and gardens of shining, blooming fungi.

The great beast was planing down on rigid wings toward a central square, landing silently at its edge without any order.

Liline pointed to a squat, roofless structure of great size, facing them across the paved square.

"That is the home of Tula and myself," she whispered. "I left her plotting there with Graff, who has no suspicion that you have followed him to the moon."

Madden drew his gun. "You and Leigh wait here," he said.

But Liline refused. "I go with you, David! But you will not harm my sister? She is lonely, bitter, misled—"

"I'll try not to hurt her," Madden muttered.

Liline and Theron Leigh were close behind him as he cautiously skirted the great square and approached the squat, roofless tower.

Pistol gleaming in his hand, he leaped suddenly forward into the building. He stopped, staring tensely around.

He was in a large, shadowy hall. Heavy metal furniture, chairs and tables of strange design, stood about. On the floor lay a space-suit and helmet that Madden instantly recognized.

"Graff's space-suit—one of the suits from our rocket!" he exclaimed. "But where are he and Tula?"

"I left them here," Liline whispered, her dark eyes wide. Then a stabbing terror leaped into her white face.

She sprang toward a door, and flung it open. Beyond was a small closet. Upon a row of hooks hung a score of strange, cowled cloak-like garments of dull-gleaming metal fabric. Small folding *wings* were attached to the shoulders.

Two of the hooks were empty.

"David!" cried the girl, her face terrified. "They've gone already to the Fire—Tula and Graff! These are the protective suits in which alone it is possible to approach the Fire—and two of the suits are gone!"

"Then we've got to follow them! Before Graff can secure any of the Fire."

Dread, a shadowing, shrinking horror, came into Liline's clear white face. He saw her slim body shiver. "It is deadly dangerous, even wearing the protective robes," she whispered. "But yes, David—we follow!"

She showed them how the metallic cloaks were worn, with their fabric covering the whole body, the cowl coming down over the head, pierced by two transparent, quartz-like eyepieces. Long gloves and loose socks of the same fabric completed the outfit. They had to discard their space-suits, as Graff had done, to don them.

David, arrayed in the monk-like garment, found that the folding wings were attached to his lower arms so that by spreading his arms he could unfold and move the wings.

"What are the wings for, Liline?" he asked puzzledly.

"We must *fly* partly, to approach the Fire," she cried. "You will see—"

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THEY hastened out, a trio of weird apparitions in the cowled robes, to where the great lizard waited.

They mounted Zah's back. Liline cried a muffled order.

"To the Chamber of the Fire, Zah!"

The lizard looked back uneasily at her, with small red eyes. Reluctantly, Zah ran and rose and flew along the cavern.

Again, they flew on deeper into the maze of chasms and green-glowing caves that honeycombed the moon. Depth beneath depth, a labyrinthian immensity that made David Madden's head reel.

Liline was crying to him, "Keep your robe close around you when we near the Fire, or you will die!"

Ever more slowly and reluctantly, Zah flew deeper into the caverns and crevices, great wings flapping in the green gloom.

"Zah fears the Fire—he will not enter the Chamber of the Fire itself," Liline was saying. "We near it now."

They were flying down along a slanting natural tunnel. At its far end gleamed light—not the greenish fungi-glow, but a growing white radiance like that of the noonday sun.

Zah, flying ever more slowly, descended and landed on the floor of the tunnel without order. The lizard craned its scaly neck back toward its young mistress, uttering a pleading sound.

"Zah will go no further!" Liline exclaimed, leaping lightly from the lizard's back. "We must go on foot—come, David!"

They started along the tunnel, climbing over masses of rock by a path that Liline seemed to know well.

The tunnel curved to the left, slanted downward further. The white radiance that came around its curve from ahead grew stronger.

Madden's heart was pounding, as they clambered on around the curve of the tunnel. Then after a few moments of further progress, he recoiled with a hoarse cry that was echoed by Theron Leigh.

"Good God!" he heard Leigh choking. "That—"

"It is the Fire that my people kindled long ago!" Liline cried.

Both men were stunned. And Madden felt blinded by the terrific radiance that now bathed them. They stood at the end of the tunnel. It debouched into space — a colossal spherical empty space, miles across, here at the heart of the moon.

And poised at the center of this inner space, like a little sun hanging at the very heart of the moon, a blazing orb of white sunlike flame pulsed like a prisoned star.

It *was* a star here at the heart of the moon—a small but starlike mass of matter flaming unceasingly through the ages with slow-consuming atomic energy. A star of fire—moonfire that had been guarded by the Watchers for countless millennia.

CHAPTER VI

Terror Unloosed

LILINE cried out and pointed with her cloaked arm toward two faraway specks that stood out black against the Fire.

"See, there go Graff and my sister!" she cried. "We must overtake them before they reach the Fire. Jump outward with me!"

"Jump?" said Madden, appalled. "But we'll fall—"

"No!" the moon-girl assured him. "There is almost no gravitation here at the heart of the moon. We will float, and we can fly with our wings—"

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As she spoke, Liline launched herself out from the brink of the tunnel into the vast space.

David Madden tensed and plunged out after her. To his amazement, there was no sensation of falling. He floated forward to her side, as though upbuoyed by a dense sea. Theron Leigh reached them a moment later, the little scientist's eyes dilated behind his quartz lenses.

"Use your wings as I do!" Liline called to them. "Hurry!"

The girl was moving her arms in a steady, beating motion. The unfolded wings of metal fabric attached to them threshed the air in a regular rhythm, and she glided forward through the abyss, toward the distant Fire.

Madden and Leigh followed her example. Their clumsy wing-movements sent them plunging forward in awkward progress. The three flew steadily out from the wall of the great moonheart cavern — on toward the sun-like Fire poised at its center.

"The Fire floats at the very center of this space—the moon's center of gravitation," Liline was calling to him. "It is well that it is so, for if that atomic flame touched the surrounding mass of the moon, all this world would kindle to a devouring blaze."

"Liline!" cried Theron Leigh's muffled voice hoarsely, the little scientist pointing wildly ahead. "Those two are not going toward the Fire — they're coming *back* from it!"

Madden's heart skipped a beat as he looked ahead and saw. It was the truth. The two specks ahead were growing larger.

Those two specks became two individual beings, cloaked in metal-fabric robes like their own, flying toward them with wings flapping regularly. And at the belt of one there hung a small, tight-covered crucible of the same protective metal as the robes.

"They have secured some of the Fire!" Liline's voice had anguish in it. "See, the man Graff carries it at his waist—we are too late—"

"They've seen us — they're coming toward us!" Leigh shouted wildly.

The two winged beings approaching had changed course slightly and now were flying straight toward them at increased speed.

"We're not too late to kill Graff and keep him from taking that Fire away from here!" Madden said grimly, tugging his pistol from the belt of his metal robe.

He aimed at the taller, leaner of the two flying figures, which he recognized as Graff's gaunt form. He shot, twice.

Graff was shooting back at him! But neither man, unaccustomed as they were to this weird floating flight in emptiness, could aim accurately.

Graff's companion — Liline's sister, Tula — darted like a striking hawk through the radiance toward Madden. The American heard Liline cry in frenzy of fear to her sister.

"No, Tula—no—"

She plunged herself in falcon flight to intercept her sister. But Tula, with a lightning curve and swoop, evaded her and seized Madden from behind. Madden struggled furiously, trying to squirm around and strike with his gun-barrel at the moon-girl. Even in this perilous moment, he couldn't forget that his antagonist was Liline's sister.

But he was at a terrible disadvantage in this floating fight. Tula, who could move with skillful sureness, wrenched the gun from his hand. It went spinning away through the air.

Madden had squirmed around, and was now face to face with the moon-girl. Through the eyepieces of the other's helmet he glimpsed Tula's face—lovely, strongly resembling Liline's, but contorted now with purpose. Her lips were

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drawn back, her eyes were dark pits of fire.

"Stop resisting, Madden—or I will kill you and Leigh now!" yelled a thick, guttural voice.

IT was Jacob Graff's voice. Graff had reached them, was floating beside them, covering them all now with his pistol from a range so short that now he could not miss.

Madden relaxed his struggles. He, and Liline and Theron Leigh floated there in mid-air in the blazing radiance of the distant Fire, facing Graff and Tula. Tula suddenly released Madden and darted to Graff's side.

Graff's eyes gleamed triumphantly through his quartz lenses. His muffled voice came thick with satisfaction.

"So! You followed me to the moon in your older rocket! Foolish, Madden—it means your death. You and Leigh are going to die before I go back to Earth with the Fire."

Graff tapped the little covered crucible that hung at his waist. "I have the Fire, yes! Only a little of it—but that little will be enough for the scientists of my country to use as the basis of new weapons that will blast our enemies from existence! No one will stop us now!"

"You're mad, Graff!" Madden cried. "That Fire will devastate Earth if you take it there—your country as well as the enemy countries!"

Graff chuckled. "Oh, no—we'll keep it under safe control, never fear. I, the new Prometheus who stole this Fire, will see that it doesn't get loose."

Liline's silver voice flung to her sister in wild, passionate appeal.

"Tula, are you going to help that evil one in his scheme? Remember the duty that was laid on our families ages and ages ago—".

Tula's voice came slowly, trembling. "I am weary of being a Watcher on this dead and empty world, Liline. I told you that—and why should I stay here and die alone and lonely, when I could be powerful and happy on Earth? *You* can stay here if you wish, Liline, but this man and I go now to take the Fire to Earth."

Tula's voice swelled. "I shall be mistress of all Earth, do you hear? Graff has promised me that, for getting him the Fire. His people will conquer all Earth with the Fire, and I will help him rule over them and all the conquered nations!"

"*He* rule?" Madden rasped. "He is nothing but the miserable slave of a crazed tyrant. And the tyrant rules alone, friendless, jealous of all. He has tricked you!"

"Quiet, you fool!" Graff roared. "When you mention the Master's name—"

"Tell me there is no truth in what he says," said Tula suddenly. Her eyes were alive, her gaze unsteady as she looked searchingly at Graff. "I have waited so long. Will I not be mistress of the Earth?"

"Mistress?" Graff retorted contemptuously. His rage had overpowered him. "Do you think my people would let a half-savage rule them — and a mere *woman* at that? Women are animals to bear children! We have a Master—the greatest in history. *He* will lead us—with the Fire!"

Tula seemed stunned. David Madden saw her looking at Graff as though unable to understand. "Then you have tricked me—played upon my ambitions and my loneliness—" Tula gasped.

And suddenly, with a piercing scream, Tula launched herself with flailing wings toward the spy.

Jacob Graff shot. The bullet seemed to check Tula in mid-flight. She slowed and floated, her body limp.

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"TULA!" screamed Liline wildly.

"She's only the first of you to die here!" Graff shouted. "I'm leaving no one alive here to take any of the Fire to our enemies."

David Madden saw Graff floating closer toward Liline and Leigh and himself. The spy was aiming his pistol, his eyes mocking behind their quartz lenses.

"Goodbye, Madden—and thanks for building the rocket that brought me here and will take me back!"

Weird tableau of four living people and one dead one, floating here in the empty air of the moonheart cavern, in the blazing radiance of the distant Fire!

Madden's winged arms tensed for a plunge at Graff that he knew in his heart was hopeless. Then he stiffened as he glimpsed something unbelievable.

Tula was still alive. The moon-girl's cloaked body, floating behind Graff, was stirring, moving feebly. Moving toward the unsuspecting, gloating spy.

"When I get back to Earth—" Jacob Graff was saying mockingly—

Tula reached the spy's back. And with a dying effort, she tore at Graff's cloak, tearing it half away from the spy's back.

A yell of amazement and awful agony burst from Graff. The next moment the clothing on Graff's unprotected back charred and scorched away beneath the blazing radiation from the distant Fire. And the flesh of Graff's back charred and withered horribly in an instant.

Tula had collapsed again into a limp, floating corpse—killed by her last effort at vengeance.

Graff was screaming terribly as the deadly radiation blasted his flesh. His eyes were awful behind their lenses.

"You won't get back—you'll die here with me!" He was clawing away from his belt the little covered crucible of metal.

Liline cried out and darted forward to prevent Graff's action. But she was too late. The spy had already ripped the tight cover from the crucible, disclosing inside the metal container a little mass of blazing, intolerably radiant matter—the Fire!

And Graff flung the now open crucible and its blazing contents toward the rock wall of the moonheart cavern, with all his force.

"Death for all of you!" howled Graff in choked, dying accents. "Death—"

And with death upon his lips, he died—his face knotting horribly behind the lenses of his cowl, his whole body twisted by awful agony..

Almost in the same moment, the flung crucible and its contents struck the wall of the moonheart cavern. And Madden saw the little mass of Fire, as it struck the black lunar rock, kindling and spreading—the whole rock wall blazing up as that atomic flame spread.

"It is the end!" Liline cried wildly. "All the moon will blaze up now with the Fire—nothing can prevent it!"

MADDEN rallied his stunned faculties. He shouted hoarsely, "We may be able to get away in the rocket if we can get up to the surface in time!"

Liline was weeping. "Let me stay here and die as my sister died—as all my people here died long ago—"

"No, Liline!" he cried fiercely. "You must come!"

He half-dragged her in flapping, floating progress toward the mouth of the tunnel from which they had emerged.

The whole one wall of the moonheart cavern was now blazing with the Fire, the flame of force leaping from atom to atom of the rock. The glare was blinding, and Madden saw that the Fire had almost reached the mouth of the tunnel.

The three gained the tunnel's mouth, and then scrambled back along it. Behind them, a steady, increasing

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roar and glare told of the Fire leaping after them.

"We can't make it!" Leigh choked as he staggered on. "The Fire is overtaking us—"

"Zah!" cried Liline in a wild, silver call. "Zah, come to me!"

A rush of huge flapping wings, a hissing, inhuman cry, a great bulk hurtling toward them down the tunnel—Zah heard and answered. The lizard's great bulk landed, recoiling from the oncoming blaze of atomic flame. They clambered precariously upon the scaly back.

"We must have the space-suits we left in the dead city if we're to get to the rocket!" Madden cried to the girl.

"To the city, Zah!" she called.

The lizard rose, threshing its scaly wings frantically in frenzied effort to escape the oncoming Fire. David saw that already the radiation had withered the wing-tips of Zah.

Ever behind them came the roar and growing glare of the Fire as it ate upward through the honeycombed mass of the whole moon. It seemed eternities before the great animal flew up into the big cave of the dead lunar city and landed in the square.

Madden pitched into the roofless tower and came out with the space-suits of Leigh and himself, and the one that Jacob Graff had left there. He leaped back onto the lizard's back.

"To the highest cavern, Zah!" cried Liline.

The lizard rose heavily on unsteady wings. And as they flew on upward through unearthly caves and crevices, as Madden and Leigh and the girl struggled into the suits and helmets, Zah's progress became ever more labored.

"Zah has been stricken by the radiation of the Fire—when he came in answer to my call down there!" sobbed the girl. "He cannot live long—"

"We don't have many more minutes, before the Fire reaches the surface," Theron Leigh cried hoarsely.

The mortally stricken lizard was summoning the last of its huge strength to carry them still further upward. But at last, as they burst into still another and higher cavern of shining fungi, the lizard wobbled downward and crashed upon the floor.

Shaken from its back, the three humans staggered erect. Zah lay dead—even its deep-seated life finally ended by the fatal radiations of the Fire.

But Theron Leigh pointed upward, and shouted wildly. Through a fissure in the roof of this cavern, they could see bright sunlight far overhead.

"The surface is just above this cavern!" Leigh cried. "If we can climb out—"

"We must jump upward into the fissure and then climb!" Madden yelled. "Quick, Liline!"

ALREADY, the roar and flare of the Fire advancing from beneath was beginning to seep into the cavern from below. The rock walls were swaying wildly around them—great boulders and masses of stone were being shaken down, small creatures running terrifiedly through the fungi.

The three jumped upward together. Against the light lunar gravitation, they shot upward many yards, into the dark, jagged fissure. Madden grabbed a projecting boss of stone and hung on with one arm, grabbing Leigh with the other as the little scientist missed his hold. Liline was safely beside him.

"Now upward!" Madden cried. "Leap again—it's our only chance—"

They made two more great upward leaps, nightmare jumps through the darkness of the fissure. The third leap brought them out into the glaring sunlight, upon the surface of the moon.

A few miles away towered the jagged

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peaks and ridges of Bulliadus crater. And at their base lay something that flashed and glittered in the sun—

"There's the *Moonflower III!*" David yelled.

The whole lunar plain was rocking and buckling wildly under them as in great, flying leaps they ran toward the rocket.

From distant peaks of craters, from cracks and fissures in the plain, white fire was creeping out, blazing with a radiance that paled even the sunlight.

"The Fire reaches the surface!" Liline sobbed.

"One more leap will make it!"

They caromed against the wall of the rocket. With stiffened hands, Madden tore open the air-lock door. When they tumbled inside, he plunged straight toward the controls.

There was no time to strap themselves into the recoil-harnesses. The Fire was already bursting from beneath in a score of places across the lunar plain.

Madden's fingers smashed the firing-keys down. There was a shock that seemed to rive his body—then darkness.

When he became conscious again, his first thought was for Liline. The moon-girl revived rapidly, and Theron Leigh was already stumbling to his feet, toward a window.

"My God—look back there!" Leigh cried to them.

Madden and Liline reached the scientist's side. They peered, appalled.

The rocket was flying steadily through space toward the great shield of Earth. But behind them, there was now no silver, gracious moon in the heavens.

Instead there flamed a *second sun!* A small, blazing white star whose radiance drenched the rocket and the distant earth, in a flaming flood.

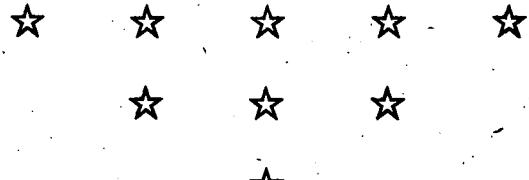
"The moon—my people's ancient world—gone forever now!" sobbed Liline. "Eaten by the Fire that will blaze there now for eons."

Theron Leigh was speaking as if in a dream that he saw materializing. "The atmospheric blanket of Earth will filter out the harmful radiation. But this new little second sun will make Earth a warmer place. It will melt the polar ice, I think—make all the Arctic and Antarctic lands habitable."

Suddenly Leigh's haggard face lit. "And those new habitable lands can relieve the pressure of expanding populations. With new lands to go to, the crowded peoples will listen no longer. The Dictator's reign is ending!" he cried. "Ending in the glorious blaze of light from the past—and the hand that engineered it was his own!"

But David Madden was not listening, now. His arm around the moon-girl, he had turned from the window.

"Don't look back, Liline," he was saying. "Look ahead, to Earth, your new home—*our* home."



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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57)

a huff, but if he was really intelligent and scientific he'd finally come back to reconsider the matter of the metal itself. If he didn't, he wasn't worth having. My judgment was right, for he turned up. He brought others. That was why I said, save only those that deserve to be saved."

Rod sighed. "I begin to see. You knew all this would happen on the surface. You got what intelligent residue there was left on earth down here in safety. You destroy the rest before they destroy what intelligence has built up. You intend, when the cloud has passed, to take over the surface, together with those who will awaken in another year. That's it?"

"Exactly," she assented quietly.

"And all this you could have done alone," he whispered. "What need had you of me? An ordinary man?"

"I've told you!" she insisted earnestly. "I love you, Rod—love you deeply. I had to find a way to keep you and yet still carry out my plan. I did it by making you a pawn—but my proof of good faith lies in the fact that I gave you genius almost equal to mine. Here and there hypnotism helped you over the difficult spots, but in time you will grasp as much, and maybe more, than I know. Even mind over matter; I will reveal that to you, too.

"Oh, Rod, don't you understand? That was my only reason—the reason why I held off an ordinary marriage. Ours can be so different, so much more complete. What I have done I have done for the future, for the good of a world that is to come. Surely I am entitled to some reward? Love? Happiness?"

Rod hesitated a moment, glanced at the still turning projector. He had a mental vision of human beings vanishing by the million as they marched to vainglorious war—human beings who had never done anything but impede the intellectuals, anyway.

Genius? He had that. The girl? She needed him, wanted him deeply. The past? It was done with. The mystery? It was solved, laid bare. The future? There lay promise—infinite promise once the cloud had passed.

He turned sharply, met the girl's steady blue eyes. He held forth his arms slowly.

"Phyllis," he murmured gently, as she came toward him. "Phyllis. . . . I shall always call you that. . . ."

THE END

REDISCOVERING LOST MINES

By

★ C. ATTERBY WOLLENSTEIN ★

LOST MINES have been rediscovered and new mines have been found in the most peculiar ways. For instance, an American engineer had been reading a description of the ancient island of Cyprus, and he became interested in its mineral potentialities. Cyprus had been the chief source of copper for the Romans, and the engineer thought there might still be some deposits on the island, so he went there to find out for himself. He did find ancient pits and huge slag dumps, and finally discovered an important mine.

In South Africa, the very small son of a poor farmer was playing with some shiny pebbles that he had found in the Orange River. The neighbors became curious about them and showed them to an English mineralogist who recognized them as diamonds. In this way the famous African diamond fields were discovered, turning one of the poorest colonies into a great British dominion.

For centuries before the Spaniards came, the Indians had worked the Muzo emerald mine in Colombia, but they hid its location from the conquistadors. It remained undiscovered for many years until one night when a Spaniard arrived in a small output leading his lame mare. When he examined her foot he found a piece of limestone holding a fine emerald imbedded in her hoof. The whole village was wild with excitement and they back-tracked the horse's hoofprints and before many hours had passed, the mine was found.

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TRUTH is a

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

●

Suddenly the citizens of Weston found themselves in a plague of truth, and there was the devil to pay that a few lies might easily have prevented

●

ALMOST everyone in Weston saw the planes that morning. Crowds pouring from the subways and elevateds on their way to work stopped in the middle of the business district to crane their necks heavenward in gaping astonishment. Traffic became horribly snarled, and the policemen let it stay that way while they, too, watched the writing in the sky.

Ordinary commercial smokewriting would not have merited more than a passing glance from the citizenry of Weston. But this was certainly different. To begin with there were ten planes printing the sky message. Secondly, they were flying so low that it appeared as if they would inevitably crash into the office buildings of the district. And last but not least, there

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was the message itself.

"HONESTY," it read, "IS THE BEST POLICY!"

The skywriting continued for another half hour, during which time the message must have been spelled out fifty times in all. Then the smoke planes departed, and Weston was shrouded by the cloak of blue vapor left in their wake.

ON the twenty-first floor of the Radio Building, located in the heart of Weston, Jack Train, staff announcer for Station W-E-S-T, left the window where he had been watching the skywriting. It was two minutes to nine, and he was due in Studio F at nine o'clock.

"Whew!" snorted Train, "those ships were flying so low you could even smell the smoke." He sniffed deeply as if to prove it to himself.

"Funny smoke at that," he said as he entered Studio F. "It's sort of sweet and fresh smelling."

He cleared his throat and looked at the glass partition behind which the engineer was sitting. The engineer signalled the "on-the-air."

"Goooood morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is Jack Train, your Pobo Toothpaste announcer, greeting you. Have you brushed your teeth today? Don't forget, Pobo is the Toothpaste Supreme. It gives your molars that brilliant lustre so necessary to movie stars. It removes dirty, dingy stains."

As if in a dream, Train heard his voice continuing gaily on past the point where the commercial ended.

"Yes indeed. It removes stains. It removes enamel. Give it a little time and it removes your teeth, too!" . . .

THE business man was coughing slightly. Smoke always made his throat harsh, and those blankety-blank skywriters spread enough smoke around the city to gag a man. He turned into his office building and was standing in front of the elevator when someone slapped him on the back. It was Jones, another business associate whom he hadn't seen in several weeks.

"Good old J. T.," boomed Jones. "Glad to see you, old boy. How have you been? Where've you been keeping yourself? Really great to see you, great!"

A mechanical smile came to the business man's face as he opened his mouth to reply. Something, at that moment, seized control of his tongue.

"You're a damned liar," he heard himself saying. "We hate one another's guts and you know it." . . .

LINDA MEADE, salesgirl in Weston's most exclusive millinery shop, brought forth another hat for Mrs. Blythe. It was the fourteenth hat that Linda had tried on the society matron in the last half hour. Mrs. Blythe coughed disapprovingly as Linda adjusted the hat. "Terribly smoky in here, m'dear."

"It's from those skywriters, modom," Linda explained patiently. "They flew so low that the entire city seems to be filled with it."

Mrs. Blythe, hat on head, began peering this way and that into the mirror before her. She turned to Linda, smiling sweetly. "What do you think of this one, m'dear?"

"It makes you look," said Linda, horrified at what she knew was coming, "like a rather pretty mountain goat!"

LANCE RANDELL placed the telephone back in its cradle and turned to face Professor Merlo. "It's a call from the airport," he stated. "The planes are all in. They've covered the city with our smokewriting."

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Professor Merlo, a sparse, bird-like little man, ran a nervous hand through his white hair. "Fine," he said, "splendid. In another hour we should be getting reports on the effect of our experiment."

Randell grinned. "You mean *your* experiment, Professor. *Your* experiment, not mine."

"Without your financial backing," the Professor reminded him, "it would still be a dream. It is yours as much as mine." He beamed fondly on the rugged young man.

"It's still hard to believe," said Randell reflectively. "A gas made from Truth Serum. If it has effect, Professor, are you still sure it will make everyone tell the truth?"

"Yes, my boy. Dishonesty will be an impossibility, providing the gas works."

"Utopia?"

"Maybe. We must first see what effect it has on one city. If it works on Weston we can change the world. At the end of this hour, every citizen in Weston should be affected by it."

Lance Randell lit a cigarette as the Professor fell silent. For the first time in his life, Randell told himself, he was putting his wealth to a good use. A world of Truth! Little shivers of excitement ran through him at the thought of how near they were to changing the course of destiny. He drummed his fingers impatiently on the arm of his chair. This waiting was nerve-racking.

Restlessly he went to the window and gazed for a moment at the serenity of the countryside. "Nice out here," he observed. "So quiet. But right this minute, this peace is killing me."

He turned back from the window. "If you don't mind, I'm going into the city."

Professor Merlo smiled. "Go ahead. I'm a little old to be impatient. I'll stay here to get the reports, and then you might drive back to give me a first hand account."

Randell grabbed his hat. "Swell. Soon as I take a look at our Utopia, I'll call you."

A few minutes later, behind the wheel of his roadster, Randell said to himself, "Somehow this is like—like playing God!"

It sent a shudder through him.

IT was only a fifteen minute drive from Professor Merlo's suburban laboratories to the city limits of Weston, but Randall tried to make it in ten. Halfway there, two sirens began to scream behind him.

"Pull over," snarled the motorcycle copper on his right. Randell brought his car to an abrupt stop. His pursuers walked over to his car. They looked grim and determined and were pulling little black books from their hip pockets.

"Thought you'd shake us at the city limits, eh?"

"I suppose you're gonna tell us you didn't know how fast you was going?" said the second, a tall, morose fellow, the sarcasm dripping from him. "A lousy seventy-five per."

Randell would have sworn that it wasn't his own voice replying with such cheerful unconcern. "Yes," he heard himself saying, "I had been hoping to shake you fellows at the city limits. You wouldn't have been able to pinch me in Weston, y'know. I was not, however, doing seventy-five. Last time I looked, I was inching up close to ninety."

During the ominous silence that followed this announcement, Randell collected the pieces. He sniffed the air suspiciously. Yes, there it was, that faint, sweet freshness! No wonder: the Truth Gas extended all the way to the

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city limits!

Suddenly the realization hit him. The officers, themselves, must be affected by the gas, too!

Randell kept his face straight during his next question. "Haven't you policemen ever broken the speeding laws?"

The policemen started to speak and stopped. They looked at each other queerly. "Of course," they declared in stupefied unison. "Lots of times!"

"Fun, ain't it?"

"Great sport," said the flabbergasted motorcycle cops.

"Now," said Randell severely, "after admitting that you break the speed laws yourselves, adding that it's great fun, do you still think you ought to give me a ticket?"

"No," said the morose cop, with an oddly bright glance. "It wouldn't be fair!"

"Well," said Randell, putting his car into gear, "so long, then!"

In his rear vision mirror Lance Randell could see the bewildered motor cops standing at the city limits, scratching their heads. He couldn't hold back any longer. He broke into peals of laughter. But he wasn't laughing by the time he arrived in Weston's business district.

CHAPTER II

The Unexpected Truth

DORIS MARTIN sat at her neat little desk in the ornate offices of Lance Randell Enterprises, Inc., sorting the batch of morning mail. The clock on her desk told her that it was almost ten o'clock. She sighed. The Boss could be expected about noon, if he came in at all that day.

At the thought of Lance Randell, Doris permitted herself another sigh, and still sighing she stared for a moment into the mirror. An oval face, framed by auburn hair and presenting a pert, freckled nose, level gray eyes and mischievous mouth, stared back at her.

The mouth smiled, revealing an even row of dazzlingly white teeth. "You," declared the mouth, "might as well be an office fixture." Doris snapped the compact shut. She coughed slightly. The office seemed terribly smoky this morning. Probably due to those planes that had been skywriting over the city.

She got up to close the window next to her desk when she saw the familiar blue roadster roll up in front of the building. She watched the rugged figure of her boss get quickly out of the car and walk swiftly to the entrance.

She walked back to her desk and sat down, making a conscious effort to assemble the mail. It wasn't any use. There were little thoughts spinning around in her mind. . . .

Doris heard the doorknob turning, and her heart did a more than its usual routine flip-flop. Randell came into the room.

"How's the staff?"

He always said that to her. It was his standard form of greeting, rain or shine, day in and day out. And he seldom waited for an answer. He just kept walking into his office.

Doris followed him.

"Here's your mail, Mr. Randell," she said, keeping her voice carefully impersonal.

She watched him while he sorted swiftly through the letters, noticing the way he hunched his wide shoulders in preoccupation. Then fearing that he might glance up, she turned back to some trivial matter.

"Ahhh." She knew from the sound of his sigh that he'd come to the letter he was looking for. The perfumed message from the bubble dancer.

"Darling," Randell read to himself,

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"even a day away from you seems like simply years." As he read on, all thoughts of the past twenty-four hours vanished. From time to time he repeated his sigh. Finally there was the signature, "Your darling Edie."

He looked up from the letter, entranced. "She's wonderful," he said rhetorically to his secretary, "isn't she?"

"Do you mean Miss Dalmar?" Doris heard herself reply.

Randell seemed startled back to reality. He wasn't expecting an answer to his statement. "Why, yes," he said "who else would I mean?"

Doris was flustered. Something had happened. She never meant to say that. It just popped out, and to her astonishment a torrent of words were following her first unintended sentence. She heard her voice continue.

"If you mean she's wonderful," Doris was saying, "I don't think she is. As a matter of fact I think she's nothing but a cheap, gold-digging little vixen. If you'd remove her warpaint, keep her away from the beauty parlor, and eliminate the dubious glamour of her profession, you'd see nothing but a washed-out, frizzled haired little know-nothing!"

RANDELL'S jaw was hanging foolishly agape at the outburst.

"You are just sap enough," Doris went on, "to think that she loves you. She hasn't room enough in that shallow heart of hers for love of anything but money and herself. You have plenty of money, and that's what she's after. Everyone in town knows it but you." Her voice was shaking now, and she knew that she would be crying in another minute.

Automatically Doris was picking up her things, moving toward the door. "It probably never entered your skull that there might be someone in the world who'd care for you even if you didn't have a —"

She was at the door, now, her hand on the knob, speaking again. "It probably never occurred to you that someone could love you so much that nothing else mattered except to see you do something with your utterly pleasant and equally worthless life besides waste it on a bubble dancer!"

For five full minutes Lance sat on the edge of his desk, staring at the door. "Well, I'll be damned," he kept repeating to himself. "Well, I'll be damned!"

His brain was going through the futile thought mechanisms that confront any man when trying to arrive at a logical reason for the actions of a woman. Suddenly the explanation flashed before him. He had forgotten all about the experiment, all about the gas! Doris was affected by the Truth Gas, that explained it all!

But if she—no, it couldn't be. Lance tried to eliminate the logical conclusion to his deductions. With a sinking feeling he was realizing that if the Truth Gas was the cause of her outburst, what she said must have been true, even about Edie!

Lance dashed for the door. There was only one answer to the agony of doubt that filled his mind. Edie was the only person who could supply that answer!

CHAPTER III

The Plague Grows

THE ash tray next to the radio in Professor Merlo's study was heaped with cigarette stubs. Slumped in an armchair before the radio ever since Randell's departure, Professor Merlo had been listening to news flashes from the scene of his Truth Gas experiment.

To be precise about it, the first bulle-

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tin was read at 9:45.

"The Weston Board of Health," said the announcer, "is investigating the rumor that an odd epidemic of insanity has broken forth in the heart of the city's business district. Victims of this strange malady are reported to be possessed with the desire to make preposterous and often insulting statements. As yet, however, these rumors have not been authenticated." Professor Merlo smiled. The announcer concluded with, "This bulletin has come to you through the courtesy of the Weston Daily Herald, the World's Worst Newspaper!"

Professor Merlo had guffawed. Now several hours after that, however, his laughter was changed to shocked amazement.

"It can't be so," the white haired little man was telling himself. "All this is but the first spasm. When it has spent itself, everything will settle into our expected pattern. Out of it will grow perfect order and Utopia. It is only natural that confusion should be the first result of such an experiment. By noon everything should be well again!"

But even as he spoke, the Professor had a feeling of uneasiness. He'd been saying the same thing for the last hour and a half. The Professor gulped, his Adam's apple bobbing along his scrawny neck like an egg in a hose. He wished fervently that Randell would return.

The radio news announcer was jabbering excitedly once more. Dully, like a man expecting an unavoidable blow, Merlo turned his head to listen.

"As the strange epidemic of mass insanity grows in Weston, today, it has been learned that three more suicides have occurred in the business district. These happened when the owners of Weston's three largest department stores leaped to their deaths rather than meet the financial ruin facing their establishments."

The Professor shuddered. He was expecting something like that ever since the bulletin of an hour ago which stated that the clerk's in the downtown department stores were selling all goods at less than cost price. Fifteen minutes after that particular bulletin it was announced that delighted shoppers were buying up every bit of stock in the stores—at a net loss of several million dollars to the owners of the stores.

The announcer was babbling on, "This brings today's death rate to the staggering total of one hundred persons. Many of these, as you probably learned in previous flashes, were victims of murder."

PROFESSOR MERLO cringed, remembering the thirty-or-so husbands whose wives dispatched them to their Maker over blood-stained breakfast tables, the fifty-odd revenge slayings perpetrated by persons who learned of long-concealed treacheries by friends or partners, the suicides whose doctors were forced to admit that they were victims of incurable diseases.

"God," Professor Merlo muttered, covering his face with his hands, "God!"

"Police have stated," continued the announcer, "that they are as yet unable to control the army of a thousand men and women who have formed a marching brigade through the streets of the city. These marchers, victims of the strange malady, were all thrown out of work early this morning when they told insulted employers what they thought of them. At present they are fairly orderly, but it is feared that, once they realize their power, looting and bloodshed will result."

Professor Merlo winced, thinking of

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the hundreds more who would join the marchers the moment the department stores were shut down.

The telephone was jangling insistently, and Merlo crossed the room slowly to where it stood. He knew what the call would probably be. He'd had nine of them already. He picked the receiver off the hook. "Yes?"

"Hello, Professor Merlo?" a voice on the other end inquired. In an almost toneless whisper the Professor admitted it was.

"This is J. Weems Sharp," said the voice. The Professor was sure of the call now. "Yes," said Merlo, "I think I understand what you're calling for. You want to tell me that you're withdrawing your endowment from my Civic Scientific Foundation."

The voice was amazed. "Yes, that's right. How did you know?"

Merlo ignored the question. "You want to withdraw your endowment from the Foundation because you are quite willing to admit that you don't give a damn for the betterment of your fellows."

"That's right," agreed the voice. "I never cared what happened to the masses. No sense in my wasting money on other people when I can keep it all for myself. I was a chump to let you talk me into it for the past ten years. Now it can go to the devil, I—" Professor Merle put his thumb down on the hook, breaking the connection.

"That makes the tenth one," he told himself bitterly, beginning to pace the floor. "They can all tell the truth, now. They'll admit that they're miserly monsters, and refuse to give any more to scientific charity. It's just about the end of my Foundation. Oh Lord," he thought, "for ten years I've been able to play on the hypocrisy of those money-bags, making them shell out money for the good of their fellowman, pleasing their egos by giving their charity a lot of publicity. But now," he shuddered, "they admit that they don't give a damn for charity!"

THE Civic Scientific Foundation had been the pride and joy of Merlo's existence, and seeing it crumble was one of the hardest blows of the day. Ten years of progress was being wiped out in the space of several hours.

It was clear to the Professor, now, what he and Lance failed to take into consideration before the experiment. People affected by the Truth Gas would not only tell what they *knew* to be true, but would also admit to things which had been lying under the hypocritical cloak of their subconscious thoughts for years. In other words, the gas was exposing ideas which people never even previously suspected they cherished!

"Something," muttered the tight-lipped scientist, "has to be done, and done fast." He paused before the window. And as he looked out across the country-side, it seemed as though nature itself had fallen under the mood of gloomy foreboding. The sun was hidden behind ominous formations of black rain-laden clouds.

CHAPTER IV

Lance Makes a Test

IF Lance Randell hadn't been so preoccupied with the doubts that clouded his romance he might have noticed the growing confusion in Weston. As it was, however, he looked neither left nor right as he put his high-powered roadster into gear and shot out for the Weston Tower Hotel where the blonde Edie had an apartment.

The crowds that were beginning to surge through the streets escaped his notice, the clang of speeding ambulances and police wagons failed to enter

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his brain, so one-tracked was his determination.

In a little less than three minutes after he'd left the office Randall drew up in front of the elaborate canopy marking the entrance to the skyscraping Weston Tower Hotel. Edie's apartment was on the fortieth floor, and Randell didn't bother to telephone from the lobby. He crossed the room swiftly and stepped into an elevator.

Edie Dalmar, when she opened the door, was astonished to see a breathless and strangely intense Lance Randell standing there with his hat in his hand. For a moment her oval, doll-like features registered amazement, then Weston's Loveliest Bubble Dancer regained her composure. She arched delicately penciled eyebrows in a smile.

"Daahhling, what a surprise! What are you doing heah at this hour?"

Lance entered the room and put his hat on the mantel. He turned and spoke.

"Edie, there are some things I have to ask you. It's very important, and I don't want you to be angry with me."

Edie moved sinuously across the room, smoothing her dark hair with scarlet nailed fingers. She sat down on the couch and turned violet eyes on Lance. "Why, deah, ah don't know jes' what it's all about, but go right ahead and ask me anything you want to."

Lance removed an enormous, floppy Cupid doll from the cushion next to her and sat down. For a moment he was silent. This wasn't going to be easy. He knew that any question he'd ask would bring a starkly truthful answer. But he had to know. He forced himself to speak.

"Edie, do you really love me?"

The bubble dancer opened her slightly petulant lips to protest, but Lance went on. "I mean, do you love me for myself? Is it, is it me that you love, or is it my money?"

There, Lance told himself, it was done. He felt his heart hammering wildly as Edie started to speak. He felt as though the answer would mean the difference between life and death.

"Why, daahhling, of course I love you! Honey, whatevah m a d e you fancy that I cared a speck about your money? I'd marry you even if you were a pauper!"

Randell was ecstatic in his relief. They were all wrong! Doris had been a spiteful, jealous wench. Edie was true! He knew it all along, Edie was true! She didn't give a damn for his money. She loved him for himself alone.

By now, however, Edie was pouting. Two enormous tears began to trickle down her cheeks. She was sobbing silently, dabbing at her eyes with a scrap of lace.

"HONEY," said Randell, sensing that he had wounded her feelings, "I never meant to doubt you, honestly. I'm sorry I ever asked you, but I was desperately unsure. I had to know. Please forgive me."

Edie, however, was not so easily consoled. She increased her snuffling. "You thought I, I, I, I was cheap!" she wailed.

Lance Randell had a sudden inspiration. "Edie!"

No reply, merely more snuffling.

"Edie," he repeated. This time she looked up.

"What?" she asked between sobs.

"You know that coat you admired so much the other day?"

Edie's snuffling lessened perceptibly. "Yes?"

"I'd like you to have it as a present, dear."

Gone were the tears, silenced was the sobbing. Edie's doll face was wreathed in smiles. She was in his arms.

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"Daahhling," breathed Edie.

"My dear," said Randell.

The floppy Cupid doll looked up from the floor where it had been dropped, its button eyes shining cynically.

WITH singing heart Lance left Edie's apartment. The world was once more righted, and now he had time to think of the second most important thing in his life, the experiment. Then, too, he'd almost forgotten that Merlo was waiting for a call from him back in the laboratories.

He glanced at his watch. 10:30. Plenty should be happening by now. The gas had had more than an hour and a half to take effect on the populace. There should be some interesting developments. There were.

As he stepped from the elevator into the lobby, Randell was immediately aware that things were popping in the Weston Tower Hotel. There had been a scant twenty people sitting about in the spacious room when Randell had first arrived there. Now, not more than a half hour later, the place was literally jammed with people. Everyone seemed to be talking at once, and in the voices there was a growing undercurrent of hysteria.

The fever spot seemed to be located around the Room Desk, and Randell began elbowing through the mob, moving in that direction.

"Stand back, buddy!"

Lance Randell was in the front of the circle around the Desk, when a blue-clad arm shot out to stop his progress. He noticed, then, that a cordon of eight policemen had blocked off a space around the Desk, and were holding the crowd back.

In the middle of the space, face downward, lay a gray haired man dressed in morning coat and striped trousers. His head was pillowed in a pool of his own blood, and his right hand held a death-like clutch on an automatic pistol.

"Horrified, Randell addressed the policeman who barred his way.

"What happened, Officer?"

"Suicide," was the terse reply. "Shot himself while we were on the way to get him."

A pop-eyed little man on his right supplied Lance with the rest of the information. "It's Gordon Carver," the little man blurted. "He's killed himself, rather than go to jail."

Gordon Carver! Randell was stunned. Gordon Carver was Weston's greatest philanthropist, most charitable millionaire, a leading citizen! He looked at the millionaire's body, so queerly sprawled out across the cold marble floor. The pop-eyed champ was still talking.

"Yeah," said Pop-Eyes, "he called the Police about a half an hour ago, confessed that he had committed some crime years ago, and was an escaped convict. He told them to come to the Weston Tower Hotel, that he'd be waiting in the lobby to surrender to 'em." Pop-Eyes paused to shudder. "I guess he couldn't stand the thought of going back to prison, so he plugged hisself just as the cops walked in the lobby."

SUDDENLY Lance Randell knew that he had to get away from that circle. He fought his way back through the crowd, feeling that he might succumb to nausea at any moment. The voices all around him were still floating to his consciousness. "What's happened to this town?" "It's the end of the world." "Terrible, out in the streets, rioting." "I saw a little child . . . killed . . ."

Randell found a telephone booth, managed to push inside. With a hand

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that trembled slightly, he fished through his pockets until he found a nickel. Then he was dialing Professor Merlo's number. After what seemed like an eternity he heard the old scientist's voice.

"Professor, it's me—Lance. I—" he was cut off by the sharp voice on the other end of the wire.

"Yes," he heard Merlo saying, "I know all about it. Got it all through news flashes. We haven't any time to lose. Have to act quickly. Where are you?"

"At the Weston Towers, but—" Kendall began.

"Stay there," Merlo continued, "I'll meet you as quickly as possible. Every moment that this gas stays over the city means more lives. I think I've hit on a solution."

"How? What?" Randell began. Then he cursed. Merlo had hung up.

What did the old man mean? What possible solution could there be? They had no anti-toxin to the gas. They knew that it would wear off in twenty-four hours, of course, but in twenty-four hours—. He shuddered at the thought of what was in store for Weston if the gas held that long!

A feeling of utter hopelessness, complete futility came over Randell as he stepped back into the lobby of the Weston Towers. Another twenty-four hours before the gas would drift from the city. Twenty-four hours in which hell would rage unchecked! The thought was staggering. Foolishly, it occurred to him that he was suffering the same emotions that Dr. Frankenstein had known upon creating his monster.

Then and there his heart went into a sickening tailspin. He had forgotten about Edie! If this bedlam was going to continue throughout Weston, no one would be safe. He had to get her out of the city, had to get her to safety while there was still time. Desperately, Randell began to push back through the crowded lobby toward the elevators.

CHAPTER V

Lance Gets a Shock

PROFESSOR MERLO waited a moment after hanging up on Lance Randell. Then he picked up the telephone again and dialed a number. As the receiver buzzed in his ear he drummed his fingers impatiently on the table, staring out the window at the darkening skies.

"It should work," the old man muttered to himself. "It has to work." Then he heard a voice on the other end of the wire.

"Weston Contractors," said the voice.

Merlo began speaking excitedly, emphatically, allowing his listener no time for interruptions. After several minutes he concluded, "Is everything straight? It's a question of time. I want them there as quickly as possible."

"Certainly, Professor," was the reply. "I understand. We'll get them there as fast as is humanly possible. But such an enormous load of sand, I can't imagine what you intend—"

"Damn you," shouted Merlo, his face purpling, "you don't have to imagine. All you have to do is get them there, and get them there in a hurry!"

"Yes, Professor," the voice was startled, "never fear. They'll be there on time."

Merlo slammed the instrument back on its cradle and stood up. He seized his hat from the top of a bookcase and stamped out of the room. A few moments later he was turning his black sedan out of his garage and onto the highway leading to Weston. Then he pushed the accelerator down to the floorboards.

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Less than a mile from the Weston Tower Hotel, a pretty, red-headed young girl was being swept along by the semi-frantic crowds thronging the business district. For the first time since she dashed tearfully from the offices of Lance Randell Enterprises, over an hour ago, Doris Martin was becoming aware of the frenzied hysteria gripping the city.

Despair at what she said to the man she loved had driven her into the streets, made her wander about aimlessly, until finally, Doris Martin knew what she had to do. And she was going to do it. No one on earth could stop her.

People were passing her, crowds elbowed by, the ordinary hum of the city increased to a tone approaching an angry howl, but Doris walked on, scarcely conscious of anything but the pavement beneath her feet. Where she was going, how long she'd been walking, nothing made any difference.

"Watch where ye're goin', sister!"

Doris had a confused vision of a fat red face peering angrily at her. A sweaty, shirt-sleeved fellow in a sailor straw had wrapped his pudgy hand around her arm and jerked her backward. Her first instinct was one of anger, and she started to speak.

"Ya wanna get kilt?" The fat man was pointing to the cars rushing by in the street, and then Doris realized that they were standing on the curbing, that the fat fellow had pulled her out of the path of the automobiles hurtling past them.

Her ears were torn by the screech of hastily applied automobile brakes. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a black sedan jolting to an abrupt stop. Terrified, she stood rooted in the center of the street.

"Good God, girl," someone shouted. "I might have killed you!" Doris saw that it was the driver of the sedan, and that he was climbing out of his car. The driver was walking over to her now, his face white, jaws shut.

"Doris!" The driver stopped short in shocked amazement.

IT was then that she recognized Professor Merlo. He had her by the arm, was propelling her to his car and talking rapidly. "What are you doing here? Life isn't safe anywhere in Weston. You must be mad to be roaming the streets while this turmoil is raging. Don't you know, haven't you seen it?"

They were in Merlo's sedan now, once more moving along in the stream of traffic. Doris found her voice at last. "Where are you going, Professor? What, what has happened to the city?"

"Plenty," Merlo snapped. "We're going to the Weston Towers. Lance is there, waiting for me. There's a lot to be done. Can't explain it all now."

At the mention of Lance, Doris paled. "Good!" she said firmly. "I was on my way there. I've a little business of my own there."

"Not with Lance, I suspect?" said Merlo, looking at her with less surprise than he might have.

"No," Doris' voice was amazingly different. "I'll tend to that—"

Suddenly the little black sedan shot across an intersection at the same moment that a lumber truck came hurtling through from the side street. It was too late for Merlo to swing the sedan out of its path. The sickening, futile squealing of brakes preceded the rending crash of a side-on collision. In the blackness that was closing around him, Merlo heard a woman scream. . . .

IT had only been his dogged determination that enabled Lance Randell to get Edie Dalmar to leave her apartment. At first she was coyly amused at his insistence that she dress and leave

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with him immediately. Then, as she began to notice the unsmiling set to his mouth, the feverish gleam in his eyes, she became a little frightened and decided to humor him.

They stepped out of the elevator into the lobby and Randell looked swiftly through the crowd in an effort to see if Merlo had arrived yet. Edie tugged at his sleeve.

"Jus' what is this heah all about, daahling?" she demanded.

Randell tore his eyes from the crowd. Wordlessly he took her arm, piloting her across the room to a quiet corner. They found a lounge.

"What's this all about?" repeated Edie, her voice oddly different in accent. She jerked her arm out of his grasp.

"Look, Honey," he began in a rush of words. "As I said before. Something terrible has happened to the city. I can't tell you any more than that for the present. You'll have to trust me. It isn't safe in Weston any more, and I'm going to get you out of here as soon as Merlo comes!"

Edie's starry eyes narrowed perceptibly. "Have you gone daffy?"

Lance Randell groaned. Then, remembering Edie had seen nothing of the effects of the gas, hadn't even heard of it yet, he made another effort to explain.

"Listen, Darling. Weston is a city suddenly gone mad. Something has happened. It's no longer safe to go out into the streets. Business is being ruined. Financial houses are collapsing. Lives are being taken recklessly. You must understand me, you have to believe me. If this keeps up, dear, everything will be ruined. It begins to look like you'll have to keep your promise about marrying me even if I were a pauper." Lance stopped abruptly. Edie was staring at him strangely.

"What's that you just said?" she demanded frigidly.

"I said that all business is being ruined. It means that all my investments will be wiped out if this continues, that I'll be a pauper," said Lance in confusion.

"Are you sure of that?" Her tone was like an Arctic breeze.

"I'm afraid so." Randell had pushed his hat back on his forehead and was staring in amazement at the expression that crossed Edie's face.

"Then," said Edie deliberately, "you might as well get out of my sight, you boob. Do you think for a minute that I have any time for a pauper. Why, you sap, all I ever wanted was your dough. This little gal looks out for herself. If you haven't got the bankroll I can get a guy that has." She was standing up now, looking scornfully at him. "Excuse me, chump. I'm leaving. Don't bother to come again!"

Feeling as if he had just been thoroughly gone over by a steam roller, Randell sat gazing in aching astonishment at Edie's retreating back.

CHAPTER VI

Sand—And Rain

FOR a time Lance Randell was unable to do anything more than stare dumbly into space. Edie Dalmar's sudden change had affected him just as forcibly as a left hook to the jaw, leaving him dazed, uncomprehending, paralyzed. His first reactions were those of hurt and bewilderment, bitterness and heartbreak. Then reason began to return, and with it the demand for an explanation of her actions.

She undoubtedly was acting under the effects of the gas, he was certain of that much. But why hadn't she spoken the truth when he talked to her in her apartment? Why didn't the gas

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influence her until they were down in the lobby?

Suddenly Randell looked at his watch. He remembered at that moment that Merlo should be somewhere in the lobby. The Professor had had more than enough time to get there. His personal troubles vanished as he realized once more that as every moment passed Weston was coming closer and closer to the brink of utter madness. And then, as he glanced in the direction of the revolving doors at the hotel entrance, he gasped.

A grotesque caricature of a man was entering. On his head was a battered fedora, mashed down over wild white hair and a blood-caked brow. His suit was literally ripped to shreds, the left pants leg torn off at the knee, and the coat sticky with oil and blood. He looked wildly about for an instant—

Randell gasped again, "Professor Merlo!"

In several swift strides Randell was at the old man's side. He threw an arm around his waist and half-carried him over to a couch. "Wasn't sure I'd make it," Merlo said faintly. "There was an accident. Truck. Hit me from the side. Doris, Doris Martin was in the car with me. I must have been out cold for five minutes. When I came around, she was gone. Couldn't look for her. Came the rest of the way by cab. Had to tell you. We must work fast!"

"Where is Doris—" But Randell stopped, fighting to drive all other thoughts from his mind. One thing alone was more important than any others. "Remember you said you'd found a solution?"

"Yes," Merlo said quietly. "It's in the weather."

Lance Randell felt suddenly sick inside. The old man was out of his head, delirious from the accident. His mouth felt dry, and all at once he knew it was all over.

They were beaten. There would be no solution. The one chance of saving the city was in the Professor's plan. And that plan had evidently been jarred from the old man's mind in the collision. Automatically he listened, while the Professor went on:

"Did you notice the weather?"

"No," Randell said, trying to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"Raincloud," said Merlo, "huge formations of them above Weston. I called the weather bureau. But the rain isn't expected until evening. Then it will be too late. We can't wait for evening, Lance. We must have rain, now. Evening will be too late." The Professor stopped, and looked at Lance strangely. "My God, Lance, don't you see what I'm getting at? Do you think I'm out of my head? Rain! Rain! It'll save us, man. Remember your elementary chemistry! The rain will destroy our Truth Gas, will disintegrate its molecular formation! Water can do that to gas, don't you see?"

There was life once more in Randell's expression, hope in his eyes as he spoke. Gone was his conviction that Merlo was babbling. "Good Lord, I see what you mean, Professor! But you said that rain isn't expected until evening—"

"That's what I said," agreed Merlo, "but we're going to *make rain,* Lance. Now!"

Randell was visibly perplexed, but he waited while Merlo continued.

"I've ordered sand," said the Professor, "twelve trucks of it. They should be at the Weston Airport this minute. I've hired airplanes. They're the type used in spraying vegetation and smoking orchards. Those planes are going to fly above the raincloud formations. They're going to *bomb* the

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clouds, with sand!" *

"But—"

"With sand!" repeated Merlo. "The sand will shatter the cloud formations, release the rain on the city immediately!"

LANCE RANDELL was on his feet. "You say the planes and the sand are waiting at the Airport?"

Merlo nodded. "I'd planned that we both go to the field. It will make it easier if there are two of us to direct the operations."

The youth helped the old scientist to his feet. "Think you'll be okay, Professor?"

"I think so," said Merlo. But his face was a sickening white.

Randell looked quickly at the Professor, indecision crossing his face. At that instant confusion broke forth in the lobby of Weston Towers, signalled by a hoarse shout of terror from the direction of the elevators. Then a woman screamed and every voice in the place became raised in bedlam.

The Professor and Randell wheeled in the direction of this fresh outburst. People were rushing back and forth in front of a corner elevator like so many frightened chickens. They seemed desperately eager to get away from that particular spot.

Then they saw the cause of the terror, a mousey little man who was standing alone in the elevator, shouting hysterically. The fellow had one hand on the controls and the other was clutching a small, vial-like object.

"Going up, going up, going up," his voice carried to where Randell and Professor Merlo were standing.

"Good Lord," someone cried, "stop him before it's too late."

"Get the Manager," a woman was screaming. "He wants to kill himself."

Lance cursed in anguish. Another one. He struggled through the retreating crowds until he stood behind a cordon of the more courageous spectators, some twenty feet from the elevator row. Merlo had followed directly behind him.

"Get back," the bespectacled little fellow in the elevator was shouting. "Get away from here, all of you, unless you want to come with me!"

The man peered owlishly at the crowd through the thick lenses of his glasses, raising the object in his hand aloft. "This is nitroglycerine! It can blow us all to eternity! *Stand back!*"

Instinctively, the row in front of Lance and Merlo surged back. Lance turned to Merlo. "It's another suicide attempt!"

The little man was shouting at the crowd again. "I'm going up through this roof. Up in a blaze of glory. Glory, for the first time in my miserable life! I've been kidding myself too long. My worthless hide doesn't mean a thing in the scheme of things, and all the time I've been a miserable failure, a fraud. But this morning I stopped lying to myself. Now I'm going out—out and up—with this nitro in my hand! Who wants to come along, eh? Who wants to come along?"

The Professor put a hand to his head, wiping away beads of perspiration. He looked at Randell. "There's nothing we can do about it."

"Good God," Randell cried, "we can't let him kill himself. It's our fault if he dies!" His voice had become anguished, impassioned, and Merlo placed

* Nothing is so tantalizing to drought sufferers as raineloud which, because of some peculiar quirk in atmospheric conditions, refuse to precipitate rain. In the Southwestern section of the country, considerable success in the past was achieved by airplanes which sprayed or "bombed" with sand stubborn raineloud above drought-stricken crops or sun-baked city streets. Action of the sand on the clouds released the rain.—Ed.

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a quieting hand on his arm.

"Steady, Lance. We couldn't foresee all this. There's nothing we can do about it. Every minute we stand here means at least ten such similar deaths throughout the city. Our duty is at the Airport. Let's get out of here, immediately."

Suddenly Lance Randell trembled. Then he quieted.

"You're right. Sorry. Let's get going!" He turned, pushing back through the crowd, when he noticed that Merlo was not moving. The Professor stood frozen motionless, staring in astonishment at the elevator.

"Going up! Going up!" Randell heard the demonical little man chanting. He also heard a gasp from the crowd, heard Merlo mutter a familiar name incredulously. Randell spun around to face the elevator.

"Doris!" the name tumbled from his lips in horror, for from a side entrance to the lobby Doris Martin was walking in a direct line toward the madman's elevator!

In the brief agonized glimpse Lance Randell had of the girl he could see instantly that something was wrong. She walked with the measured step of a sleepwalker, her face blank, eyes unseeing. And in the shocked hush that fell over the lobby he heard her muttering almost inaudibly.

"Lance Randell, you're a fool. A fool." She seemed to be sobbing. "I love you, Lance. She'll never take you . . ."

"*GOING up! Going up!*" The wild cry of the maniac rang out through the sudden silence like an unclean cackle. He swung the grilled doors of the elevator open momentarily, and in that instant Doris Martin, unseeingly, stepped inside the cage.

"Ha—ha! Going up, sister! Glad you're coming along!"

As the elevator door clanged shut Lance Randell's mind became a crimson blot. With an animal snarl he lashed out at the bodies that had blocked his way to the elevator, beating a path before him, hurling himself through the opening. He didn't notice Merlo barging along behind him. He didn't notice anything but the cage with the little suicide and the dazed young girl.

A wild laugh came from the tiny cage, and Randell shouted as he saw it start upward. The light above the door flickered white. Merlo was beside Randall by this time, grabbing him by the arm. He wheeled as he felt the old man's fingers digging into his sleeve.

"What in the hell are we standing here for?" Randell yelled. "Doris is in that elevator, and by God I'm going after her!"

"Get a grip on yourself, Lance," Merlo's fingers dug deeper into his arm and his voice was low, fierce. "Remember what I told you, man. For every moment that we're delayed from the Airport, something like this happens somewhere else in Weston. We've wasted too much time already!"

The Professor's voice brought calm back to Randell—calm and agony at the full import of the situation. "Professor," he muttered shakily, "Doris will be blown to eternity. I have to follow!"

"You'll be sacrificing a hundred lives for one."

Randell looked at the small puddle of blood forming beneath Merlo's leg. "Can you make it alone, Professor?"

"You love the girl?" The Professor's voice was soft.

"Yes . . . I never realized . . ." said Randell, and he realized with bitter irony that the Truth Gas was at work once more.

Merlo held out his hand. "I'll make it, Lance, somehow. God give you luck,

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lad, and speed!" Then the Professor was gone, moving unsteadily off through the crowds. The open door of an adjoining elevator caught Randell's eye and he stepped toward it without hesitation.

"Don't be a fool," snapped a voice directly behind him.

Lance Randell wheeled to see a tall, broad shouldered fellow standing behind him. "Keep out of that elevator. Get back into the crowd. There's a lunatic loose in an elevator with a vial of nitroglycerine. We're clearing the lobby."

"Thanks," Randell grated, "for the information!" As he spoke his fist swung simultaneously. The efficient-looking young gentleman went down heavily. The elevator doors closed with a wild clang.

Lance Randell grabbed the controls of the car, throwing them forward instantly. In his heart was the horrible fear that he'd wasted too much time, that he would be too late. The car lurched forward from the quick start, then shot upward. From the moment when he first spied the insane operator in the elevator, something had been hammering at the back of his consciousness. It seemed to hinge, somehow with Edie Dalmar. And now, with every second holding the answer between life and death, he racked his brain in an effort to hit upon a plan.

HE knew that his only hope of stopping the suicide,, saving Doris, lay in that elusive subconscious discovery. He glanced swiftly about the narrow confines of the cage, mentally thanking God that it was not one of the modern, room-type elevators enclosed on all sides. Instead, the upper-half of the walls were merely spaced iron grillwork, making it possible to see across the shaft from one elevator to another.

He peered out through the grill. With a silent prayer of thanks he saw that the cables in the adjoining shaft were moving slowly.

"He's taking his time," he muttered. "If I can catch the car before he drives it through the roof I—" Suddenly the elusive plan that had been hiding in his subconscious was crystallized for Randell. He had it.

Of course! The Truth Gas didn't carry to the upper floors of the hotel. It was a heavier than air substance. That accounted for Edie being unaffected by it when she was in her apartment!

His plan was clear in his mind, now. He knew that his one chance of saving Doris lay in forcing the lunitic to the upper floors of the Hotel without discharging the nitro. Once above the gas, the little man would return to normality, would listen to reason.

The little car shot past the twenty-fifth floor. Five floors more and Randell caught a glimpse of the understructure of his quarry's elevator.

Face taut, Randell began to slow his own cage. Three seconds, and he was adjoining the death car. He threw his controls back to stop.

"Ha!" He could see the crazed little man turn from where he stood at the controls of the car. He peered through the grillwork at Randell.

Suddenly the suicide's voice cackled, "So you want to come along, too?"

His eyes sweeping desperately across the car in an effort to see Doris, Randell called, "Where's the girl?"

The little man glanced downward in devilish amusement. "She's lying on the floor. Passed out a moment after we started up."

Randell was talking rapidly, "You can't take that girl to her death. For the love of heaven, man, she has nothing to do with you or your life. Let

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her out!"

Another hysterical burst of laughter from the demented little fellow was the only answer. Randell opened his mouth to speak, when the other car began to ascend once more. Cursing, he threw the controls forward again.

"32" flashed by.

"33" dropped past. "36" faded by, and cold sweat trickled off Randell's forehead, smarting into his eyes. He forced himself to look upward, catching a glimpse of the car above. Suddenly he cursed. Something was wrong.

The other car had come to a stop, and was bobbing between floors. "He's going to drop the nitro," Randell thought desperately. He slowed his tiny cage down until he was beside the other.

Looking across the shaft, he was startled. Neither Doris nor the nitro-man was visible!

Instinctively he called out, "Doris!" The silent elevator shafts echoed and re-echoed his cry.

He set his controls, rushing to the grillwork wall, trying to get a better view of the cage in the opposite shaft. Then he saw them. In one corner of the elevator Doris was lying face downward. In the front, next to the controls, the madman was stretched out flat on his back. Next to his open hand was the vial of nitroglycerine—rolling gently back and forth on the floor of the car!

With a numbing sensation of horror, Randell saw that the controls of the car were not set correctly, that they might slip any moment!

Steeling himself, he swept his eyes across the cage in the opposite shaft, looking frantically for some solution to the dilemma. The car was stuck between floors, making it impossible to get to it from a hall door.

Randell realized as much instantly. There was only one other solution, and breathing a silent supplication for time, he set to work on the wall grillwork of his cage.

Precious moments rushed by as he began the laborious effort required to unscrew the thick screen fastenings. It would have been a difficult enough job with tools, but Randell had only his hands, and inside of two minutes they were torn and bleeding.

SOBBING under his breath, knowing that the controls might loosen in the opposite car at any instant, Lance Randell paused only to wipe away the sweat that clouded his eyes. Then at last one side of the screen was loosened.

It was enough. Calling on every last ounce of strength, he pulled backward on the grilling, bending it enough to push his head and shoulders through the scant opening. Hoisting himself up to the ledge where the screening began, he stood teetering, looking down thirty-seven floors of elevator shaft.

He closed his eyes for a moment, grating his teeth against the pain he knew was coming, then seized one of the black, greasy cables with his lacerated hands. It was an almost superhuman act of will that let him swing his feet from the comparatively safe ledge of his own car out into space.

For an agonized second, Randell was sure that his grip on the cable was loosening, that he was going to pitch headlong down the shaft. He wrapped his legs around the huge black coil, hoping to God that the grease wouldn't make such a grip impossible. It was now or never.

One hand lost the cable. The motion made him slide several sickening feet. His hand caught the grilling on the death car, held him there.

With his free hand Randell went to work on the screen fastenings of the

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cage in which Doris was lying. Time was a blur now, and every frantic second spent in tearing at the bolt fastenings seemed like a section of eternity. He knew he wasn't going to make it, felt his legs growing weak in their grip around the cable, felt the flesh tearing open wider and wider on the hand clutching the coil. But he continued feverishly.

The grilled siding was almost opened, one more bolt, it was loose. . . .

Through the daze of sweat, exhaustion and pain Randell knew that he had to throw all his weight over the half-side of the death car, and as he realized the fact, he caught a split-second vision of the vial of nitroglycerine on the floor, of the control lever that might slip with the slightest jarring of the cage.

He grabbed, releasing all but his legs from the cable, got his elbows over the side of the car. Now his legs were free, and he was clambering into the tiny elevator, making for the controls. . . .

DORIS stood close against Lance Randell, and his arms were around her. They stood in the street outside the Weston Towers. The angry howl of the city had subsided to a tranquil hum, above which could be heard the drone of many airplanes, growing softer, fainter.

Tiny grains of sand were falling in many places over the city, but they were unfelt, locked in droplets of rain. And the rain kept falling gently, steadily, washing away the madness and sorrow and death that a plague of truth had given freedom.

Lance Randell looked down at the girl.

"Why, darling," he said softly, "you're crying!"

She turned her face upward. "No," she murmured, "it's just the rain on my cheeks."

He drew her tighter. "Liar," he whispered. . . .

COMING NEXT MONTH

In the April, 1971 *FANTASTIC STORIES* (On sale Jan. 26th) A DOUBLE BLOCKBUSTER—Two short novels, WOLF QUEST by TED WHITE, the long-awaited sequel to Phoenix Prime, and DREAD EMPIRE by JOHN BRUNNER, a new Traveller in Black, plus HOW GEORGES DUCHAMPS DISCOVERED A PLOT TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD by ALEXEI PANSHIN, THE INCONOCLASTS by DENNIS O'NEIL, and THE EIGHT-THIRTY TO NINE SLOT by GEO. ALEC EFFINGER.

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

same ring, of course, but the experiences bound up with it were identical. Call it either chance or unerring inevitability—the fact remains it *did* come to you, by producing false death, led you back to that other life.

"Last of all, do not forget that in the interval no man until your father—Douglas Dallaway, that is—found a way to get high enough into the stratosphere in order to allow cosmic rays to reach him. At any rate the ring never had cosmic rays upon it until you went up with Terry. From that moment events started to repeat. As is so often said, history repeats itself. . . ."

He broke off in sudden alarm and glanced round anxiously at a sudden violent shaking of the mausoleum. A distinct r i p p l e went through the ground; loose chunks of masonry came clattering down. The wind seemed to scream the louder for a split second.

"Nothing to worry about," Munro said briefly, glancing at his watch. "It's just three o'clock. The shock was the shaft being opened by radio waves—"

"The Sahara shaft!" Elsa cried.

"Exactly; just as I told you. I'd have given anything to see that fountain of fire go into space. The intensity of the explosion can be imagined when we can feel it even at this distance."

"I guess we'd better be getting out of here," Terry said quickly. "I'll carry you, Elsa. We'll see what's happened."

By ten o'clock that night the whole world knew what had happened.

By radio across the earth the news was flashed. Eye witnesses spoke of having seen that living column of incredible fire leap from Africa. The whole world felt the stunning concussion of the explosion, experienced the increase in hurricane created by the superheated wind.

But by ten o'clock the raging winds were abating. A calmer, more settled appearance was over the face of the earth. The incessant earth tremorings of the past weeks were subsiding; volcanic eruptions gradually ceasing—The inner pressure had gone. Nothing of course could return the lands already sunken, but those that had survived were safe, at least for another three or four thousand years.

"And by that time," Terry murmured, staring over the flood from the headquarters' windows, "we ought to have gotten sense enough to tame Earth's periodic illnesses."

Elsa, lying in the heavy easy chair beside him, smiled a little.

"I'm not interested in the future, Terry; nor for that matter am I interested any longer in the past. All I want is the present—to see again the blue skies, sunshine, fields of corn."

"You will," Terry promised. "We'll take up where we left off—"

Terry smiled a little, turned to the girl and gently pulled the ring from her right hand.

"What's that for?"

"Just this." He flung the window wide, hurled the ring out into space with all his strength.

For a long time they both sat in the cool, reviving breeze staring at the spot in the flood waters where it had disappeared.

COMING JUNE FANTASTIC STORIES

On Sale Mar. 25th—POUL ANDERSON'S latest new novel, THE BYWORLDER. Also starting in this issue will be the first of a series of articles by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP, LITERARY SWORDSMEN AND SORCERERS: SKALD IN THE POST OAKS.

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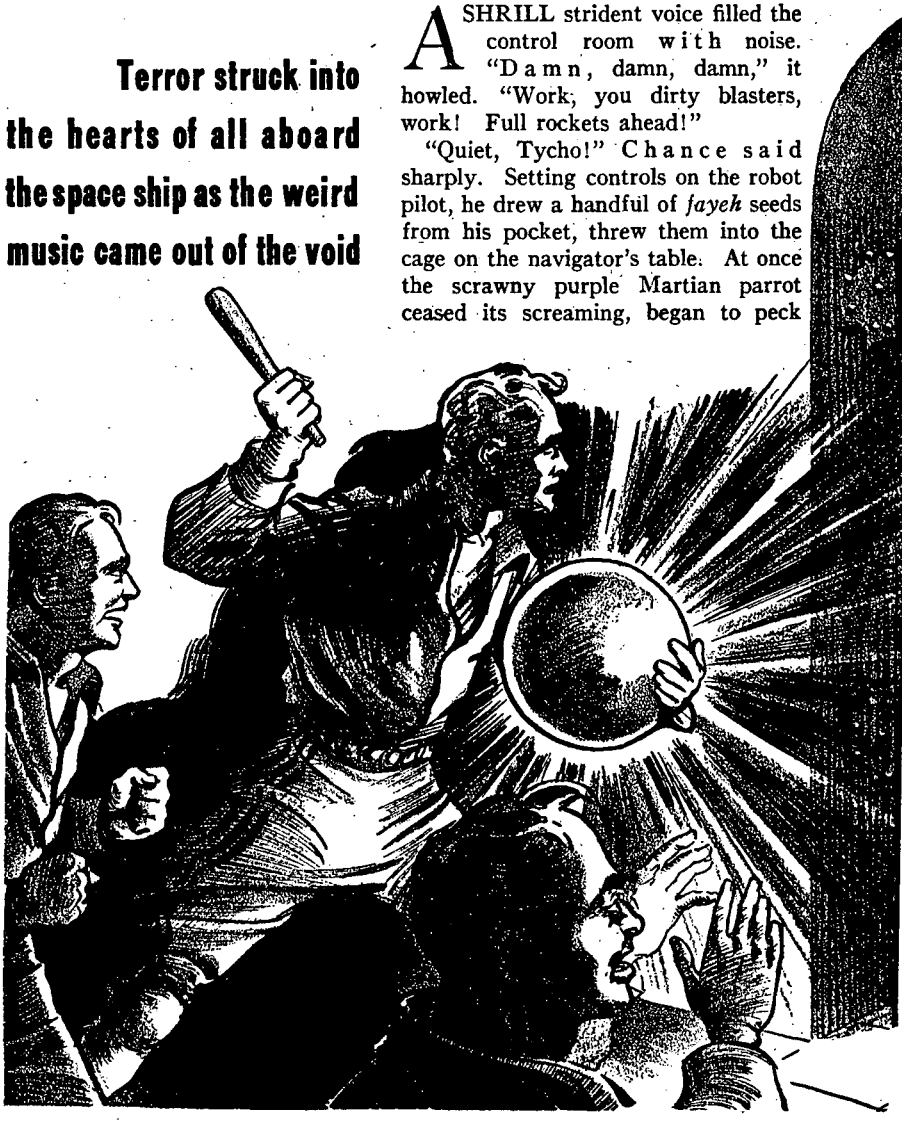
Slaves

BY FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Terror struck into the hearts of all aboard the space ship as the weird music came out of the void

A SHRILL strident voice filled the control room with noise. "Damn, damn, damn," it howled. "Work, you dirty blasters, work! Full rockets ahead!"

"Quiet, Tycho!" Chance said sharply. Setting controls on the robot pilot, he drew a handful of *fayeh* seeds from his pocket, threw them into the cage on the navigator's table. At once the scrawny purple Martian parrot ceased its screaming, began to peck



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# of Rhythm

greedily at the seeds, pausing from time to time to render hoarse snatches of "The Rocketeer's Revenge," or choice excerpts from "The Wife of the Man in the Moon."

Martin Chance grinned. He had gotten Tycho from a miner in the crater of the same name . . . and lunar miners had a vocabulary which commanded respect the length and breadth of the solar system. Chance was about to return to the controls when footsteps sounded in the corridor, and a round, nervous little man entered the control room, evidently in haste.

"Captain Chance!" he exclaimed. "I thought I heard noises . . ."

"Only Tycho here, Mr. Holden." Chance motioned to the parrot. "He was kicking up a fuss for his dinner. Always does that."

"Damned nuisance!" Mr. Holden grunted irritably.

Tycho cocked his

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head on one side, regarded Mr. Holden quizzically.

"Damned nuisance!" he shrilled.

Chance stifled a grin, threw a cloth over the cage. Then, suddenly serious, he faced the *Astra's* owner.

"Been thinking, sir," he said. "About our course. I admit I signed for two years, no questions asked, but it seems pretty obvious we're heading for Saturn. And you know what they say about that planet."

Mr. Holden's pale eyes lingered on Chance's lean hawk's face.

"All right!" he challenged. "What do they say?"

"Music, coming through space, which sound waves can't cross, to enter ships. Eerie, inhuman music . . ."

"Huh!" Mr. Holden laughed scornfully. "Spacemen's superstitions! I signed you as a captain and adventurer who'd take a ship to hell and back if ordered! And now you turn out to be as bad as the rest of these superstitious soot-hogs!"

COLOR drained from Chance's face. Of all terms, spacemen detest being referred to as soot-hogs, since the filthy task of cleaning carbon from the tubes of rocket-ships is done by half-caste, undersized Martians, on a plane with the chimney-sweeps of ancient terrestrial legend. Chance counted ten slowly, until his fists relaxed.

"I didn't say I believed these stories," he said finally, choosing his words carefully. "Even though most such yarns are based on fact. I merely asked where we're going, and why. So that if these mutterings among the men should come to a head, I'd be able to reason with them. However . . ." Shrugging, he turned to the controls.

Mr. Holden stared through the observation port at the ringed planet ahead, tossed his cigar into the sand-box.

"All right," he said slowly. "If it'll make you feel any better to know where we're bound, I'll tell you. Ever hear of Janice Kent?"

"Janice Kent?" Martin Chance nodded. Few people hadn't heard of her. She was the newscaster's delight, glamor girl number one of the solar system, reckless rocket pilot, and heiress of the Kent Spacecraft millions. Chance recalled the pictures of her that had flooded the television lanes when she left earth on the audacious expedition to Saturn two years before. A sleek yellow helmet of hair, snapping blue eyes, a band of freckles over her tip-tilted nose, man's shirt and whipcords that somehow emphasized her femininity. In two years there had been no trace, no hint, of what had befallen the madcap expedition.

"You remember, then?" Holden grunted. "Well, Captain Chance, it just so happens that Miss Kent owns the controlling interest in Spacecraft. And without her we can't elect officers, make any radical shifts in policy. Under the law she's got to be missing seven years before she's officially declared dead. Seven years during which Spacecraft must mark time, avoid any big decisions, any changes! It's costing us a fortune! So the minority stockholders got together, put up the money to hire this yacht, elected me as their representative. I'm to either bring Miss Kent home, or find proof of her death. And I'll do it if I have to comb every square inch of Saturn's surface! If the men don't like the idea of heading for Saturn, that's just too bad! As for this talk of music in empty space, that's a lot of stupid, nonsensical twaddle . . ." John Holden broke off, his rotund face falling into sagging, putty-like lines. Stiff as a run-down robot, he stood there, listening.

Martin Chance froze. A noise was

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echoing through the control room . . . a noise the like of which he had never before heard. Very faint, seemingly far-off, it was a strange monotonous rhythm, a droning cadence, vaguely melodic. On and on it hummed, this weird barbaric tempo, never varying. Eerie, inhuman in quality, it was like a chant of disembodied spirits, a call from beyond the end of time.

"Good God!" Mr. Holden whispered.

CHANCE said nothing. His eyes swept the control room, took note of the disconnected radio. Then, as though to satisfy himself, he removed several of its tubes and wires; the throbbing melody did not cease. It seemed to come from all sides, from the glittering control panel, from the iron-plated floor, from the dial-covered walls. Chance even snatched the cloth from the parrot's cage, but Tycho sat cowering on his perch as though frightened by the unknown sound.

"Music!" the *Astra's* captain muttered. "It's not on board! There's nothing on this ship could make such a sound! And sound waves can't travel through the ether!"

Mr. Holden nodded weakly; all his confidence, aggressiveness, seemed to have left him. Before he could speak, however, a rush of feet sounded along the companionway and a crowd of panicky spacehands burst into the control room.

"Captain Chance!" Wallace, the little radio operator, pushed forward. "You hear it? It ain't according to nature's laws that music should come out of nowhere, board this ship! God knows what'll come next! We've had enough of this! Put about, while we can!"

"Put about?" Chance laughed scornfully. "Because of a little noise? And you call yourselves spacemen! We're going on!"

"No!" A squat, powerful blaster plunged forward, his face desperate. "The ship's haunted! Who knows what devil's powers lie out here around Saturn! And us defying a Warning! I won't . . ."

With a whip-like crack Chance's muscular fist met the big man's jaw. Gasping, the blaster toppled to the floor, limp, inert.

"Get back to your quarters!" Chance said evenly. "We're not turning from our course, devil's music or no devil's music!"

For a long moment there was silence, broken only by the weird, pulsating harmony, monotonous, macabre, inexorable, like the throbbing of some giant heart. Then Grogan, the quartermaster, prodded the fallen blaster with the toe of his boot.

"Up, ye scut!" he chuckled. "Sure, you're missing the foinist part of the concert! 'Tis not every day we've a banshee to serenade us!"

A ragged laugh went up from the spacehands. With forced bravado they picked up the dazed blaster, carried him from the control room. When they had gone, Holden spoke, raising his voice to make it heard above the flowing, insistent rhythm.

"What . . . what was it?" he muttered. "This crazy music. . . !"

"Just spacemen's superstitions," Chance grinned. "Stupid, nonsensical twaddle, eh, Tycho?"

The parrot squawked, shrilly, flapped his wings.

"Damn, damn, damn!" he screamed. "Full rockets ahead!"

CHAPTER II

Captured by Saturnians

FOR two day the *Astra* swept toward Saturn, a flickering silver mote in the dark infinity of space. During those

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forty-eight hours the men aboard her had become grey, shaking wraiths, tortured by the ceaseless droning rhythm. Nights without sleep, the humming, maddening chorus tearing at their nerves, the fear of the unknown worrying them. As the ship had drawn nearer Saturn, the eerie melody had grown louder, while the wads of cotton they used to plug their ears gave little help. The rhythm seemed to vibrate from the floor, the bulkheads, everything they touched. Already they had discovered little Wallace, the radio operator, pounding the walls with his fists, begging the music to stop. Several others seemed on the verge of a similar breakdown. Even the irrepressible Tycho had ceased ionizing the air with profanity, lay huddled upon the bottom of the cage, as though physically beaten by the sound.

As to the drone itself, Chance found it still a mystery. More a tempo than actual melody, it seemed to have a regular cycle, then repeat itself, like some celestial music-box, never ceasing. And it was something deeper than mere sound; the hammering cadence seemed to permeate his whole being. Now and again Chance would find himself unconsciously moving or speaking in time with the measured steady tempo. Sometimes he had felt he wanted to breathe in time to it, have his heart beat in its rhythm, live in accordance to the sounds.

Only once had the throbbing chorus changed. That was when the *Astra* had swept over the great ring of satellites that girdled the sixth planet. Then Chance had fancied he heard a break in the weird harmony, a shrill whining discord. As swiftly as it had come, the sound died out, leaving only the strange gripping cadence. And Chance, busy with the delicate operation of landing, had had no time to puzzle over it.

Now, bent over the control panel, he kept his eyes on the row of dials. No way to see the ground below, what with the dazzling flare of the landing rockets. Chance's gaze flicked toward Grogan, the broad-shouldered quartermaster, and Holden, a harassed, bleak-faced spectre, standing behind him. With one last glance at the gravity indicator, he pulled the rocket switch. A slight bump and the *Astra* rested on Saturnian soil.

"Landed, sir. Any orders?" Chance's tones were chilly. He had been markedly polite toward Holden of late.

The *Astra's* owner peered through the observation port. Sight of Saturn's gloomy, barren surface depressed him.

"We'll go out and have a look," he announced. "What do the tests show?"

Chance looked at the gravity indicator.

"Not so bad as I thought," he muttered. "We'll be able to move. How about air, Grogan?"

The mate was bent over an inlet valve that had admitted Saturn's atmosphere into a spectroscopic chamber.

"Good bit of free hydrogen*, sorr," he grunted. "Still, I don't think we'll need spacesuits. It's cold out there."

"Then the air's okay. Excellent." Holden rubbed eager hands. "We'll go out at once."

Chance frowned. Air and gravity tests were elementary. Ships on strange planets usually took tests for days before their crews ventured out. They hadn't discovered the cause of the throbbing, pulsating rhythm yet, either. And there might be life, unpleasant life, among those shadows, those bold rocks and gnarled shrubs.

"Don't you think we'd better make further tests?" he asked. "No sense being in too big a hurry . . ."

* To be expected with the planet's critical velocity 22 miles per second, mean value, and hydrogen's maximum molecular speed at zero Centigrade only 7.4 miles a second.—Ed.

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"No hurry!" Holden exploded. "With millions to be made in Kent Spacecraft preferred? Soon as we get word of Miss Kent, proof of her life or death, we're set. Public confidence will be restored when they learn the company's hands are no longer tied by her absence and the stock'll go sky-high. Once I get inside the Heaviside layer with that proof I'll radio my associates in code to buy, and we'll clean up! And you say there's no hurry! Of course if you're afraid to go out . . ."

Grogan, watching Chance's knotted fists, waited for the explosion. Once again it didn't come. Chance had strict ideas of discipline and Holden, as owner, was his superior. A long minute's wait and the veins in his temple subsided.

"I am under your orders, sir," he said tightly.

And as Holden left the room, Tycho's strident voice rose above the rushing music in mocking repetition.

"Under your orders, sir! Your orders, sir!"

IT was a grim, tight-lipped Chance who swung through the air-lock after Holden a half-hour later. Both men, wrapped in heavy, fur-lined suits, resembled bulky phantoms in the ghostly, vague half-light.

They were, as near as Chance could make out, on a barren rock-strewn plain, dotted with huge boulders, patches of ice, and clumps of strange grey-leafed vegetation. The air was heavy with stifling gases, but breathable. The gravity dragged them down, set their hearts pounding.

Chance followed Holden's ungainly figure with more than normal caution. On this, a new, unknown world, anything could happen. Even now they might be breathing in deadly germs. And that crazy pounding melody, hammering on, and on, tearing at one's nerves . . .

Holden was leading the way across the plain. Behind them the *Astra* was only a phantom ship in the misty gloom. The financier, Chance reflected, probably counted on Janice Kent's being within a mile or so from where they had landed. In which case he was an optimist. Out of several billion square miles he expected to find a girl missing two years. A girl who may never even have reached Saturn. Who was probably dead . . . Stanley and Livingstone stuff, only infinitely worse. With all the immense surface of Saturn, there wasn't a possibility . . .

"Chance! Chance, come here!" It was Holden's voice, rising above the eternal rhythm.

The captain ran, fighting the gravitational drag. Holden was standing at the foot of a slight rise.

"Look!" he said, pointing.

Chance stared. Upon the crest of the ridge lay a gleaming metal tin, a synthetic food container. Upon it, in big red letters Chance could make out the words, "S. S. Martian."

"You see?" Holden cried. "The *Martian!* Janice Kent's ship!"

Chance stared at the tin. In spite of the moisture in the air it shone brightly.

"Hasn't been there long," he said slowly. "No rust. Wonder why it's parked up on that ridge?"

"So we'd see it, of course." Holden was impatient. "Probably contains a message. We'll find out!" He started up the slope.

"Wait a minute!" Chance caught his arm. "I don't just like the looks of this. It might be a trap . . ."

Holden broke away from him. "Yellow!" he spat out. "Yellow soot-hog!"

And then Chance exploded. His language would have put Tycho to shame.

" . . . damned, bull-headed idiot!"

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he concluded. "Can't you see that metal tarnishes in a few minutes in this atmosphere? That the can must have been put there *after we landed?* To draw us . . ." The words died on Chance's lips. He swallowed hard, staring.

Figures were appearing over the crest of the rise . . . baroque, unearthly figures. Twice human size, their bodies were covered with a pale, silvery fur, yet were somehow graceful, well-proportioned. At first glance their features, with sunken toothless mouths, waving antennae, seemed hideous, but on closer inspection a grave dignity was manifest. In spite of all their strangeness, the giants were indefinably human.

"Good . . . God!" Holden's hand fumbled for the hilt of his flame gun. Then abruptly he froze, rigid.

At that moment Chance felt it . . . a gripping mind-force that pinioned his brain, held him immobile, helpless.

"Telepaths!" he grated. "And us walking into this like a Sunday school picnic!" Then, humanly enough, "Didn't I tell you, Holden . . ."

AT sound of his voice the tall Saturnians had halted, their faces drawn, their antennae twitching. The thought-field grew in intensity and Chance felt himself completely dominated, unable to speak. A queer sensation of having a dual personality possessed him. His senses were able to record events, his mind could think, but another will held him powerless. Raging inwardly, he stood frozen, watching the towering figures descend the slope. There was, he observed, something almost robot-like about them. They moved in perfect time to the thundering cosmic rhythm that rolled in measured, monotonous cadence throughout this world of Saturn. Every movement, every gesture, followed the throbbing beat as some grotesque *ballet comique* follows the music of an orchestra. Human robots, moving, living, in time to a celestial harmony!

The figures were near, now. Holden's face was like putty. He seemed struggling in vain to speak. Suddenly he and Chance felt themselves turn, walk woodenly toward the *Astra*. The captain swore mentally. He had no control over his actions. He remembered the childhood trick of standing in a doorway with the backs of both hands pressed tightly against the sides of the entrance. Upon stepping out of the doorway your arms rose automatically. That was how it felt now, only it wasn't just his arms . . . his whole body was moving at someone else's volition. So was Holden's. From the corner of his eye Chance could see the Saturnians dropping into the shadow of the bushes, tall rocks. Ahead, the *Astra* loomed through the swirling mists.

Chance felt himself pause before the ship. Grogan and several others were clustered behind a porthole. Now he felt himself beckoning to them, motioning for them to come out. He fought it bitterly, but to no avail. A moment's wait and the airlock swung open. The quartermaster, followed by the rest of the crew, climbed down the metal ladder.

"What's up?" Grogan exclaimed. "You look like a ghost, sorr! We . . ."

The men from the vessel went rigid under the force of surging will-power. In silence the huge, furry Saturnians were emerging from concealment, their antennae waving. Stiffly, like sleepwalkers, the row of earthmen commenced to move forward, escorted by their captors. And the deafening cosmic melody hammered on, deafeningly, pounding the men like blows from a padded sledge.

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THE journey across the gloomy windswept plain seemed interminable. Rocks, scrub vegetation of a bizarre, alien variety, occasional patches of snow . . . the earthmen, pale automatons, the huge Saturnians moving, quite unconsciously it seemed, in time to the roaring, ragged rhythm.

An hour's walking brought them to the city. In the center of a plain almost Mars-like with its red iron rust, a cluster of massive spires and towers thrust at the grey sky. Domes, bridges, ramps made an intricate filigree of stone, grim, solid, age-old. Sweeping like some huge mercury arc above the city was a curved tube of immense proportions, its ends disappearing into the ground on each side. The tube glowed whitely, giving off light and, apparently heat. Molten lava from the planet's core, Chance decided, run above the city to warm it, then forced below to be reheated. He eyed their tall furry captors with new respect. He had fancied them primitive, backward . . .

The interior of the city was another revelation. It seemed built entirely of a soft yielding material, very tough, not unlike a hard rubber. Walls, streets, buildings, all were of this plastic, deadening footfalls, echoes. Except for the eternal sourceless rhythm, the city was like a tomb. Not a sound from the crowds of Saturnians who lined the streets, though the air was full of thoughts . . . blurred, incomprehensible thoughts that brought no clear pictures to the earthmen's minds.

The Saturnian guards swung into a big building to the right. Entering the hall, Chance felt the mental pressure relax. He turned his head, experimentally, found that he could move. But like the others behind him, he had been disarmed. A group of figures strode from the shadows of the hall. Six tall Saturnians . . . and a slim, yellow-haired earth-girl! More, the girl was smiling, nodding at her grotesque companions as though they were life-long friends!

"Miss Kent!" Chance burst out. "This *is* luck! If you'll just tell these beings that we're a rescue party come to take you home . . ."

He broke off, staring. The girl had cringed at his words, fallen back with an expression of pain on her face. Her companions reacted similarly, their antennae twitching ominously. Chance was about to speak again when a surge of mental power wiped his lips clean of speech. His hands, however, were free.

The girl stepped forward, her movements timed to the strange cosmic cadence, placed two fingers upon Chance's wrist. Puzzled, the *Astra's* captain felt her fingers pressing in a succession of short and long taps. Suddenly it dawned on him. Morse! Just as it was used in light-signals to bridge great gaps in space. He began to translate her message.

"Do not speak. Noise distorts the life-tempo. The sound of your rockets on landing created havoc. I was like you when I reached Saturn. The *Martian* crashed and I alone survived. But during the months while they nursed me back to health, the great rhythm dominated me and I have now realized that life in perfect, regular tempo is far preferable to my previous existence which was disjointed, unharmonious, full of harsh noises and actions. Here, everything moves in accord, in perfect flowing time. You are at present a discord. It will be necessary to keep you and your men apart for a few earth-weeks. By that time you will have fallen inevitably into the rhythm of Saturn and will no longer wish to leave."

"Suppose we resist?" Chance tapped

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out on her wrist. "Suppose we don't want to live in time to the . . . melody?"

"The power of their minds makes resistance impossible," she replied. "You cannot be permitted to leave since the noise of your rockets creates terrible discords, injures everyone within a radius of miles. When your ship was sighted, I was sent for from Etar, another city far away, near where the *Martian* crashed, and advised setting the trap which enabled us to capture you. Like myself you will be taught telepathic communication, far superior to harsh sound-waves. You will find that this is the only true life."

Chance groaned inwardly, glanced at his companions. They were staring at him questioningly, unable to speak. He had no chance to explain. Under the force of the inexorable wills he found himself turning, leading the others from the hall. Out into the street, along it until they reached a big grey building with curiously barred windows. A prison of some sort . . . To Chance, the crazy cosmic melody was like mocking laughter.

CHAPTER III

The Rhythm of Peace

THE room occupied by Chance and Holden was narrow, vaguely illuminated by the light that poured through the tiny window. Chance, watching Holden pace the floor, suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Stop it!" he said curtly. "You're beginning to keep step to that damn music!"

"What of it?" Holden snapped with sudden irritation. "I don't like your tone, Mr. Chance! I'm in command of this expedition . . ."

"You're in command of the *Astra*," Chance reminded him. "And right now we're not on board. Your bungling got us into this mess and I'm not counting on your getting us out. Now sit down and keep quiet."

For a long moment Holden stared, then with a bellow of rage he plunged at Chance.

The captain's fist only traveled six inches but Holden landed heavily against the wall, lay there clutching a bruised jaw.

"I'll have you broken for this, Chance!" he muttered. "It'll be irons for you when we get back aboard the yacht! Insubordination . . ."

"When we get back aboard the yacht!" Chance laughed harshly. "We'll be lucky if we ever see it again! You don't realize what we're up against! A minute ago you were pacing the floor unconsciously in time to the rhythm. Know what that means? It means the tempo of Saturn's beginning to get you! Janice Kent said that in a few weeks we'd fall into it. Just like she did. And we are! Unless we fight . . ."

Holden didn't reply, maintaining his sullen silence.

Ignoring him, Chance peered through the tiny window. The streets below, warm, well-lit by the great arc that swept over the city, were peopled by the tall men of Saturn, all moving in perfect time to the throbbing music. Every gesture, every motion . . . He felt a sudden desire to give up the struggle, to yield to the insistent melody. To breathe, to move, to think, in time . . . Abruptly he squared his shoulders.

"Damn, damn, damn, as Tycho would say!" He spoke aloud, hoping that the sound of his voice would break the spell of the mighty rhythm. "Bet that dizzy bird's half-starved, too! I'm beginning to realize how he feels,

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being cooped up in a cage! Who said that stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars" . . . he paused . . . "iron bars . . ."

ALL at once Chance nodded, understandingly. "Iron! And to think I didn't realize!"

He whirled on the sullen Holden. "Look here! We know sound waves can't cross space! Yet we know this crazy melody entered the iron hull of the *Astra!* Here in this cell it's louder near the door than over in the corner! You hear! That means magnetism! Magnetism, vibrating all iron and steel until they give off sound! Like a telephone receiver! Iron, mined and cast, iron, still in the earth, all vibrating! The red-rust color of the soil proves there are large deposits on this planet . . . each particle fluctuating to give off sound! No wonder we heard it aboard the *Astra,* no wonder it seems to come from all directions! And the reason for the varying magnetic flux is equally simple! Saturn's the only world with rings of satellites! Now suppose those thousands of chunks, of all sizes, were also iron! Whirling, they'd cut the lines of force that run outside the planet, from magnetic pole to magnetic pole, set up a changing flux that would cause every ounce of iron within range, whether mined or still in the earth, to vibrate, give off sound. The planet's iron core, even, filling the air with noise! Catch on? It's Saturn's rings that cause the music. Millions of tiny iron satellites, acting like the holes in a music roll, to create the rhythm!"

"So what?" Holden snapped. "All we've got to do is stop the rings of satellites from revolving, I suppose. Nothing to it."

"Never mind the wisecracks," Chance exclaimed impatiently. "I'm beginning to get a clear picture of all this! No wonder the Saturnians have adjusted their lives to it! Heard this crazy rhythm from the moment they were born. No doubt it wears a channel in their brains until they can't do without it. Even outsiders must succumb to the music in time."

"Crack-pot theories!" Holden sneered. "Why . . ."

"I don't know. But I'm beginning to understand. Look, Holden! Suppose you worked in a factory where machines rattled and roared. The first day it would be deafening. But after a time you'd never notice it. In fact if the machines suddenly stopped, the silence would startle you, just as a person accustomed to quiet would be startled if there was a sudden noise behind him. It's the adaptability of living organisms. This world is like a regiment of soldiers marching to the music of a band. Let the band strike one false note and the whole regiment is thrown into confusion, out of step. That's what we've done with the roar of our rockets, the sound of our voices, the actual unrhythmic gestures we make."

"All right," Holden challenged. "But what about Janice Kent? She wasn't born in this world. Why is she a slave to the rhythm?"

"That's the effect of music."* Chance frowned. "Whatever the tempo, you find yourself beginning to yield to it."

"Cheerful prospect!" Holden grated. "Meaning we'll become like the Saturnians. Slaves of melody! Moving in time to it, not daring to talk for fear

*Man always tends to adjust himself to a tempo. Witness the jitterbugs of today. Wild dance music literally forces them to move in time to it. A work-melody, like the age-old Volga Boat Song, throws the listener into a slow, steady cadence. His heart, his breathing, literally slow down to the rhythm. A military march speeds up the heart, makes the listener want to fall into step. Even deaf people can feel the beat of a march.—Author.

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our voices will create a discord! Not wanting to leave, afraid the sound of the rockets will throw us off tempo!" He caressed his jaw, scowling. "You . . ."

A wave of telepathic commands, stern, inexorable, drove them to silence. At the door of the cell stood one of the tall, grey-furred Saturnians. Beside him stood Janice Kent.

Helpless, held rigid by the Saturnian guard's telepathic control, the two men stared at her. The guard drew a small tube from his belt, directed it at the lock. A beam of purplish light struck some sensitive selenium plate and the door swung open. Janice Kent stepped forward, grasped Chance's wrist.

"I have come to see that you are comfortable," her fingers tapped out. "These first few days are the hardest. After that you begin to fall into the tempo. I shall stay in this city . . . they have given me quarters on the lower levels of this building . . . until you and your men have ceased to be discords. Then we will teach you telepathic control, the true meaning of the life-tempo. Submit to the melody and your captivity will be brief. Fight it, and a longer period of confinement will be necessary. I will see you soon again." She dropped Chance's wrist, moved off, walking in jerky rhythm, like some small marionette. The Saturnian, keeping them motionless by telepathic control, placed a large bowl of fruit on the floor. Not until the cell door had been locked once more did he release them from his will.

"And that," Holden muttered, "was glamour girl number one of the solar system! A robot controlled by music! Talk about your totalitarian states! This beats them hollow! Everyone working, moving, living in time to music! That cursed hammering music!" He whirled about, his face livid. "It's getting me, too! Getting me! Every move I make, I find myself doing it in cadence! Walking in time to it, talking, even breathing! We're being forced into a groove, made slaves like Janice! We've got to do something! Do something!"

"Easy, Holden!" Chance gripped his arm. "Remember, they said it would take a couple of weeks, and we've only been here a day and a half! We're still . . . discords! Able to think and act as we want, to fight the power that's making robots of us!" He picked up the bowl of fruit the Saturnian had left them. The container was of thin, beaten silver. "Funny he should have frozen us with his telepathic impulses before bringing in the food."

"Why not?" Holden grunted. "To keep us from jumping him."

"As if the two of us could handle that giant! No, it's something more . . . Holden! It's . . . noise! Remember how they winced when we talked? Noise throws them off their tempo! You know how a sour note in a symphony grates on your nerves? Well, that's what noise does to them! Only a hundred times worse! The Saturnians can't stand a break in their eternal rhythm!"

"So what?" Holden said stiffly. "We can't make any noise when they hold us motionless."

"We can't, no." A tight grin came over Chance's lean face. "But they can! Mr. Holden, you may get back to your stock manipulations yet!"

CHAPTER IV

Escape by Sound

THE cell was quiet the following evening . . . quiet, except for the rolling celestial melody that surged with rhythmic beat, inexorable, insistent. Like some giant flail, beating him,

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Chance thought. He glanced at Holden, lying listlessly upon his bunk; the financier's fingers were drumming unconsciously in time to the music, his face was pale. The incessant rhythm had knocked the spirit of resistance out of him. He seemed already on the verge of surrendering to the relentless tempo.

Chance listened attentively to the roaring melody. Those sharp piercing notes . . . he had heard them just before the guard appeared yesterday with their food. And if, as he suspected, the Saturnian day was regulated by certain notes in the ever-repeated chorus, their guard would be due at any moment. Chance crossed the cell, shook Holden violently.

"No! Stop it!" The financier muttered. "Disturbing tempo . . ."

"That's what I aim to do! Get up!" He dragged Holden erect. "We're going to try and get out of here! Now! Talk . . . sing . . . recite the multiplication tables . . . anything to break that damned rhythm! And be ready to act!"

Holden stared stupidly about the room. Chance had pried one of the hobnails from his boots, hammered it into the wall. A strip of cloth torn from his shirt hung from the nail, while attached to the strip was the thin silver bowl in which their food had been placed.

"Huh!" Holden muttered. "If escape were as simple as that, they'd never have given us the bowl!"

"You forget these cells weren't made for our special benefit," Chance chuckled. "The Saturnians confined here in the past . . . political prisoners, I suppose . . . would never have dared use the means we're attempting since it would have been as bad for them as for their guards. But we haven't given way to the melody yet. We . . ."

He went rigid as a surge of power gripped his mind.

Like statues the two earthmen stood, willed to immobility. The tall, furry Saturnian guard, food in hand, moved rhythmically toward the door. A purple flash from his electric key and the lock clicked open, the door swung back.

Things happened fast. The suspended silver bowl, struck by the iron door, gave off a loud gong-like crash, momentarily drowning out the monotonous celestial melody. With the sound the guard's face twisted, his body quivered as though under a blow. The terrible telepathic commands wavered, and Chance was able to take a step forward.

The guard had just regained his mental grip when the hanging bowl, swinging back, struck the door once more. His sense of rhythm distorted, the guard staggered back writhing as though in agony. Their wills released from domination, Chance and Holden plunged forward, bore their huge opponent to the floor. Under the rain of blows the big Saturnian went limp.

"Got him!" Chance panted. "Here!" He handed Holden the purple tube. "Free the others!"

HOLDEN raced along the corridor, focusing the ray of light upon the locks of the cells. Bewildered, the others of the *Astra's* crew stumbled into the passage.

"Sing!" Chance cut short their questions. "Make noise! Plenty of it!"

With blind obedience the gaunt, grim-faced spacehands burst into a ragged chorus of "The I. P. Patrol."

From the craters of cold Luna, to flaming Mercuree
You'll find the spaceways guarded by the ships of the I. P.
For we've tamed the little Marshies,

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and we've mopped up on Io,
And we'll get you out of trouble, no matter where you go.
Ask the girls on any planet and they'll tell you that we . . .

Roaring the ribald verses in stentorian voices, the spacemen followed Chance along the corridor. At its end was another door, but the ray opened it. Singing, howling like madmen, the *Astra's* crew poured down a broad flight of stairs. At sight of them two huge Saturnian guards whirled about, their faces drawn in concentration. Before the deadly web of thoughts could enmesh the prisoners, however, the sound of their voices, raised in a crashing chorus, drowned out the eternal rhythm, filled the room with a wild cacophony of sound. The Saturnians winced, then took to their heels, stumbling awkwardly across the hall, into the street beyond.

"Sure, an' they don't appreciate music!" Grogan grinned. "And me the foinist tenor this side o' Venus! If 'tis only a counter melody as is needed to throw them off their sound track, we've no worries . . ."

"Can't tell what else they may have up their sleeves!" Chance muttered. "Wait here! I'm going to find Janice Kent!"

He plunged into one of the side corridors. The girl had said, he remembered, that she had been given a room in the lower levels of this building. He raced onward, peering into every room he passed. Twice he saw Saturnians, but lusty shouts, echoing along the passage, put them to flight.

A door at his right caught Chance's eye. He pushed it open, glanced inside. A slim, golden-haired figure leaped back in horror as he entered.

"Miss Kent!" Chance exclaimed. "Come on! We're going back to earth!"

The girl cringed at his words, then caught his wrist. Chance could feel her fingers pressing out a frantic message. "Can't leave! Your voices, the loss of rhythm . . . can't stand it! Please! Let me alone!"

Chance hesitated. Dimly he could hear the hoarse shouts of the earthmen, their rough song distorting the eternal cosmic melody. He grinned crookedly. A heroine who refused to be rescued! After all they had gone through to bring her back to earth . . .

"Sorry!" he said brusquely. "We're going home!"

As he stepped toward her, the girl began to pummel his chest, desperately, hysterically. Chance made a swift decision. He had never hit a woman before, but in a case like this . . .

The blow was clean, merciful. Janice Kent collapsed limply.

CHANCE threw her over his shoulder, raced back to join the others. They were where he had left them, in the hall of the building, singing lustily. Holden shot a glance at the captain, frowned.

"What's wrong with her?" he demanded. "If you've . . ."

"Don't talk. Sing." Chance pushed open the huge metal doors. "Let's go!"

The shouts, the chanting of the earthmen echoed loudly through the canyon-like streets. Groups of Saturnians, appearing from time to time on the street levels above them, fell writhing to the ground, crawled hastily away . . . their timing, their sound-controlled tempo killed by the voices of the earthmen. A discord in a celestial melody . . . a world, marching inexorably toward its destination, thrown out of step . . .

"This way!" Chance panted, motioning across the plain.

Forward the little group ran, through

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the outskirts of the city, into the cold bitter twilight beyond the glowing arc. Weighed down by the dragging gravity, choked by the heavy, thick air, the earthmen raced on across a plain strewn by dark rocks, patches of moss and lichen, queer, grey-leaved shrubs. Behind the fugitives groups of the towering Saturnians hovered, moving in perfect rhythm, keeping ever out of earshot of the discordant shouting. And from every hand the monotonous cosmic harmony beat out its inexorable melody.

Chance, reeling under the weight of the girl, shot a quick glance about. A party of the Saturnians, still well out of hearing, were circling the group of earthmen in an effort to come between them and the *Astra*. Their tall, graceful forms, silvery fur shining in the wan radiance of the distant sun, were like those of pale phantoms. Others were advancing from time to time toward the fugitives, forcing the latter to shout to drive them back. Apparently they considered the sound-waves as weapons which must in time wear out. Nor were they wrong. Already the crew of the *Astra* were out of breath, so hoarse from continual shouting that they could barely croak. Chance groaned. From time to time, as the Saturnians moved rhythmically nearer, he could feel the surge of mental force plucking like insistent fingers at his brain. Again the men tried to sing, to break the terrible tempo, but their cracked voices were feeble, faint.

Holden, running at Chance's side, pointed. Looming through the swirling grey mists was a long, sleek shape. The *Astra!* Her airlocks open, just as she had been left by the earthmen. What had kept the Saturnians from taking her over, Chance wondered? Bent beneath the weight of the inert girl, he waved the others forward.

"Ship," he whispered hoarsely. "Hurry! Before . . . Saturnians . . ."

The others nodded, plunged on. Behind them their pursuers also had sighted the ship, realized what must result if the earthmen should unleash the stuttering roar of the rockets. Their strange, quasi-human faces drawn with fear, they swept forward. Again the earthmen tried to shout, to drown out the endless life tempo, but only a croak came from their raw throats.

Chance shook a weary head. Encouraged by their feeble cries, the Saturnians came nearer. Again the telepathic commands, numbing their brains. All at once two of the lagging earthmen froze to immobility, toppled to the ground. The surge of will-power grew . . . Grogan, Holden, fell.

BLINDLY, Chance staggered on, still carrying the girl. The *Astra* was only a few paces ahead. A stream of telepathic impulses gripped him. The rest of the earthmen had fallen, victims of the Saturnian wills . . . wills developed through centuries of unspoken communication. One step Chance took, a second, fighting with all the energy at his command. Six feet of moss-padded earth between him and the ship . . . if only he could . . .

Suddenly Chance's brain succumbed to the terrific thought power. He slumped heavily to the ground. The others, he could see, had fallen under the mental assault, lay like toppled tenpins upon the bleak soil. And the Saturnians were rushing forward to secure their prey . . .

Lying there, Chance's mind was a tangle of despairing thoughts. So close to escape and now . . . this! To be imprisoned again, guarded more closely until the inexorable cosmic melody had made them slaves! And Janice Kent

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. . . youth, beauty, money . . . all lost in this barren world . . . High above, Chance could see the rings of satellites, yellow bands against the dark sky. A celestial music-box, grinding out its eternal cadence . . .

The Saturnians were advancing upon their prisoners, holding them motionless with their brain-force.

And at that instant it happened. A shrill, inhuman voice arose, screaming in strident, angry tones.

"Damn, damn, damn!" it cawed. "Full rockets ahead!" Following which it launched into a tirade of the most eloquent and abusive profanity.

"Tycho!" Chance gasped. "Good old Tycho!"

Again the parrot screamed its profane torrent of expletives. Tycho was hungry, and no telepathic commands could reach his sluggish brain.

"Damn, damn, damn!" he howled. "Dirty soot-hogs! Poor Tycho!"

The Saturnians fell back, wincing, and Chance felt his brain released from the terrible grip. He realized, now, what had kept the furry telepaths from entering the ship. With one leap Chance was at the *Astra's* air-lock. Snatching up a stone, he began to pound it upon the metal hull. A booming, deafening clangor rewarded his efforts.

As Chance frenziedly hammered the rock upon the *Astra's* hull, the silver-furred men of Saturn broke, ran. Tuning thrown off by the terrible din, they staggered like drunken men, reeled awkwardly across the plain.

"Quick!" Chance exclaimed, beating a furious tocsin with the rock. "Get aboard! Start the motors idling!"

Grogan nodded, disappeared through the air-lock. Holden, the crew, their brains numbed by the telepathic battering, followed. A moment later the *Astra's* rockets began to roar at idling speed. Not until their roar drowned out the weird Saturnian rhythm did Chance throw down his chunk of stone, and, picking up the helpless girl, enter the ship.

"Close the locks!" he snapped. "We're leaving this mad-house at once! You" . . . he motioned to a couple of the spacehands . . . "take Miss Kent to my cabin! We'll have to keep her locked up until we're out of range of the magnetic influence of Saturn. Once we're free of this damned music, I think she'll come around." He paused, feeling Holden's gaze upon him. "If, of course . . ." Chance eyed the bruise on the owner's jaw . . . "Mr. Holden agrees."

"Agrees!" Grogan roared. "Devil take him, 'twas his blundering got us into this! Your orders are enough for us, Cap'n . . ."

"Quiet, Grogan!" Chance said stonily. "Aboard this yacht Mr. Holden is owner . . . in command! If he chooses to break me, put me in irons, you'll obey him! Discipline is the first law of space!" He turned once more to the financier. "Your orders, sir?"

For a long moment the two men's eyes met. Suddenly Holden's hand was extended.

"I've been a fool, Chance," he admitted. "If you came into my office at Mercis and tried to tell me how to run my business, I'd throw you out. Yet I've been trying to tell you how to run things in space. I've caused enough trouble at it is. And I apologize. From now on you're in command!"

Martin Chance's lean brown hand gripped Holden's soft, pale one.

"Right!" he said. Then, facing the group of spacehands. "Open those rockets to the limit! We're heading home!"

THE END

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A CITY ON TITAN

BY HENRY GADE

On this month's back cover you will see Frank R. Paul's colorful painting of the skyscraper city of Orro, on Titan, the largest moon of Saturn, the ringed planet.

TITAN is the largest satellite of Saturn, being some three-thousand miles in diameter. It is very close to the size of Mars, and it is a much younger and habitable world.

Astronomers haven't decided the exact nature of the atmosphere of this world, but most of them agree that it is perfectly capable of supporting life, and find no direct evidence against this contention. They picture it as a world where civilization might progress much as it has on Earth, and is even very much in the same stage as it is here on our own world. Although it is smaller, its development has been impeded by the proximity to its giant parent, which had to cool down first, to allow its child a chance at life.

Thus, we find Titan almost a sister planet, with a few minor exceptions. The first of these is gravity. A man could leap twenty-two feet into the air on Titan. The attraction is considerably less. The second is atmosphere. It is a bit less dense than on Earth, and more than likely has a high nitrogen content. The third major difference, among these minor exceptions, is the light the planet receives. It is quite far from the sun, and therefore receives about one third the light Earth does. However, this is augmented by giant Saturn, whose high reflective power sheds additional sunlight upon the planet, making the nights much less dark than on Earth.

The city of Orro, which we see on our back cover, is a city of gigantic skyscrapers. These tall buildings are possible, because the weight of material on this world is perhaps one quarter what it would be on Earth. And therefore, buildings of greater proportions and weight can be constructed. This factor also allows for the greater use of metals. For instance, since Titan could easily have stores of the noble metals in much greater quantity, having been spawned of a world in great eruption at its birth, we see in Orro, huge skyscrapers built of gold, of a metal similar to the "orichalcum" of our own ancient Atlantis, and of alloys of copper and nickel.

Heights of two-hundred stories would be a common sight to the visitor to Orro. And great spires, towering into the heavens, would present an inspiring architectural scene.

The people of Orro are certainly not like the people of Earth, except that they have two arms, two legs, and a body constructed along the same lines as evolution on Earth has carried man. They have arm appendages which are supple and sinuous, and capable of handling delicate instruments and therefore of great scientific advancement.

Evolution has proceeded at a faster rate on Titan, because of its smaller size, and therefore we find that the people have insect-like characteristics. Their bodies are slim and wasp-like, and their waists and chests are like the thorax of an ant.

As a race, they are probably very religious, and because Saturn, the most unusual, incredible sight in all the solar system is the largest thing in their sky, they probably worship it as a deity. Even to Earth astronomers, the planet presents an awe-inspiring sight, and to these inhabitants of Titan, filling half their sky as it does, in its rainbow of colors, it must appear as the most mysterious and majestic thing in their lives.

Each of their buildings, in addition to being dwelling places, and places of manufacture and business, are temples of worship, the top of each building being a domed structure of worship where a fire is constantly kept burning as a votive offering to the planet that is their god.

Titan, still in a volcanic state, provides power from its volcanoes, harnessed by the people. Since Titan has no oceans, no rivers, no waterfalls, water power is unknown, and steam power is not possible. The planet is a cold one, and the volcanic heat is a necessity to heat the metal cities, and to provide energy for the highly developed thermal science that has evolved.

Food is grown on the slopes of volcanoes, and is of a mushroom type, to a great extent. Mushrooms grow swiftly in the reflected, polarized light from giant Saturn.

The food is harvested by hand, and carried to the cities in wide baskets that are carried on the heads of the workers.

Beyond the smelting of metal for city-building, industry is almost unknown, and harvesting is the business of every inhabitant.

Electrical and radio science is not developed, because of the tremendous interference offered by the static electricity formed in the rings of Saturn and radiated to Titan.

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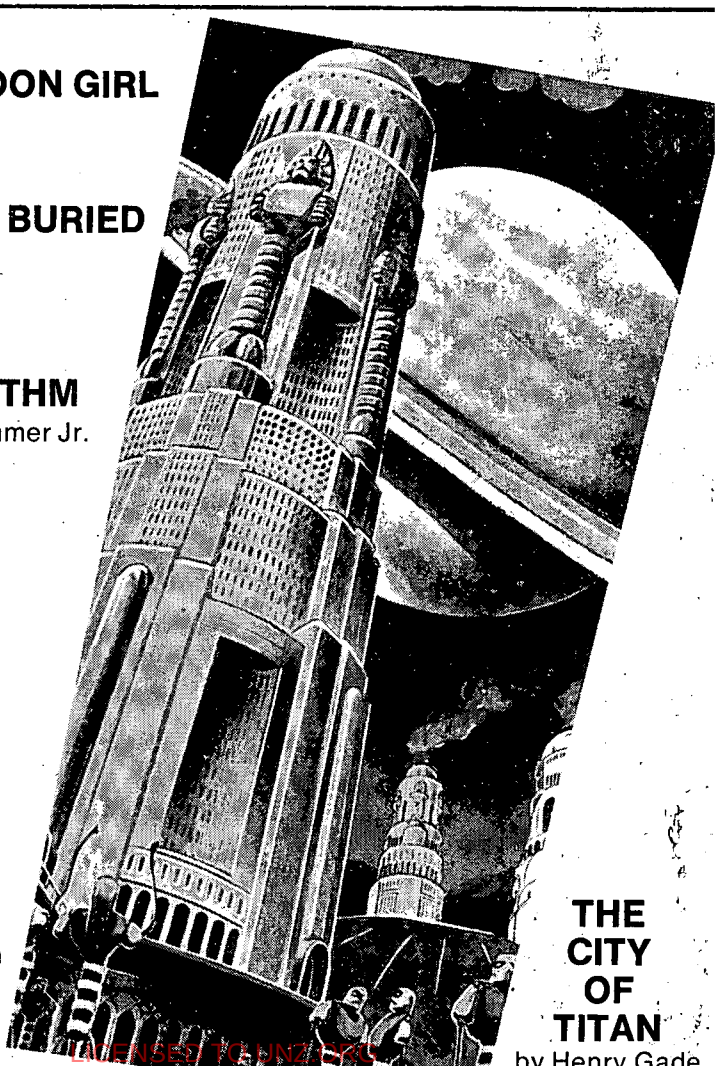

THE CITY OF TITAN
by Henry Gade

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